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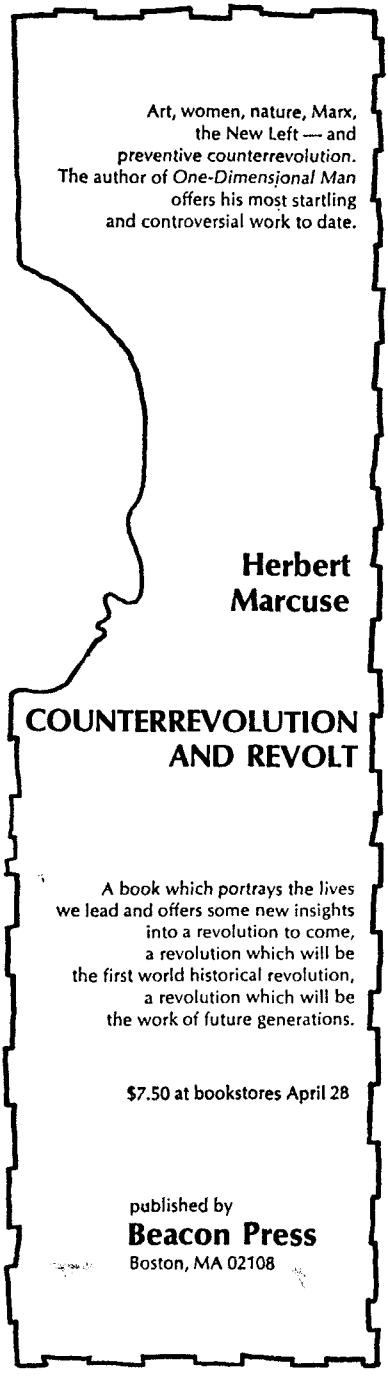

NOTES

"Art and Revolution" is from **Counterrevolution and Revolt, HERBERT MARCUSE's** new book, which Beacon is putting out this spring. . . . **JAMES TATE** is at the University of Massachusetts this year. Little, Brown is bringing out **Absences,** his latest book of poems, in the summer. . . . **PETER BROOKS** is working on a book about the melodramatic imagination. Mr. Brooks is in French at Yale. . . . **MARIA LEHMANN** was a member of the Workers' Theater in Berlin, and studied economics there. She left Germany in the thirties and now lives in England, where she writes plays for TV and the theater as well as fiction. . . . **JOYCE CAROL OATES's Ontological Proof of My Existence** (PR, No. 4, 1970) was put on by the Cubiculo Theater recently. Miss Oates is in London this year. . . . **RONALD SUKENICK** has been teaching in California. Delta brought out his latest book, **Up. "From Out"** is from **Out,** his new novel. . . . **VASIL' BYKOV** is a Russian writer whose work Dutton will be bringing out here. . . . **BUS** is an Italian artist. . . . **ALICIA OSTRIKER** will be on leave from Rutgers next year, and is planning to finish a second book of poems. . . . **JOHN GOODE** teaches at Reading (England). His "main interest," he tells us, "is in the sociology of literature." . . . **ANDREW McLAUGHLIN** teaches philosophy at Lehman and the Graduate Center of CUNY.

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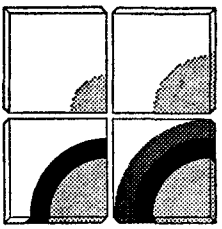

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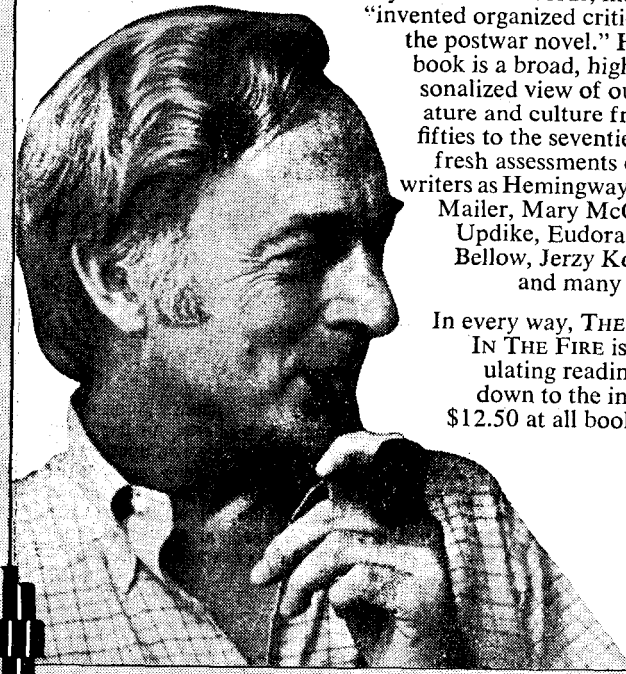

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ART, POLITICS, AMERICA

Art and Politics. I don't know whether more nonsense has been written about literature or about politics. But perhaps the most nonsense has come from those ideologues both of the right and the left who have tried to squeeze art and politics into some theoretical scheme as though they were two abstract categories distinct from or opposed to each other. Hence discussions of art and politics often have a lofty air which disguises their oversimplifications. Politics has usually boiled down to left politics, and literature reduced to its "content." A basic difficulty is that the subject has become embedded in the conventions of social criticism, so that the questions are indistinguishable from the traditional answers. And Marxist criticism has usually combined narrow politics with narrow aesthetics.

As compared with even the best Marxist writings, Marcuse's piece in this issue is most impressive. It is one of the few attempts I have seen at a fresh Marxist analysis. Except for Walter Benjamin, Marcuse is the only Marxist I know who has made use of the more sophisticated methods of modern criticism. But with all due respect for Marcuse's intellectual powers, he, too, is restricted by his definition of art and politics, and hence in his idea of their relation.

1. Despite his flexibility and lack of orthodoxy, for Marcuse politics is revolutionary and Marxist. This means that the politics of art is dictated by the existing revolutionary movements.
2. Marcuse's assumption that "art can and will draw its inspirations, and its very forms, from the prevailing revolutionary movements — for revolution is the substance of art" sets up too direct and simple a connection between art and politics and could be used to justify vulgar Marxist notions of art as a political weapon. Marcuse himself argues for revolutionary art with considerable subtlety, and his statement that "art can indeed become a weapon in the class struggle by promoting changes in the prevailing consciousness" seems to suggest a broader view of revolutionary art. But those changes are measured by their relation to revolutionary politics. And the work he cites (Brecht, Dylan, black writing) suggests a special idea of revolutionary art. What about Joyce, or Pollock?
3. The interpretation of Beckett, where Marcuse is not at his best, strikes me as quite arbitrary and reductive, and suggests the possibility of finding facile political meanings in almost any writer.
4. The term "beauty" is a hangover from old aesthetic theories, not very relevant, I think, to actual writing or problems of criticism. At best, it is an honorific term used to indicate that a work is good

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or effective. In this sense, it is dangerous, for it can be used arbitrarily to praise a work whose politics one approves of.

5. Ultimately, too tight a revolutionary aesthetic excludes radical or experimental literature that has no immediate relation to radical politics, or is in some way opposed to it. Unless we assume that every advance in consciousness promotes the "revolution" — an assumption that is either false or tautologous — it seems to me we have to deal with the fact that much good art, particularly in literature, comes out of the crevices of consciousness, out of the moral and intellectual underground. If it can be said that the best modern writing expresses a critical and radical spirit, it must be also said it usually does so indirectly and often takes perverse and eccentric forms, whose political implications are rarely clear-cut. And the demand for a revolutionary art has almost always produced more popular, more conservative forms, like realism and conventional narrative, as well as more explicit political content.
6. Alienation might be a component of modernism. But it is not necessarily a revolutionary force, as Marcuse says it is, particularly today, when the feeling of alienation has been attached to popular institutions and the commercial media. It is now possible to be alienated and celebrated, radical and successful, all at once. And I am not sure Marcuse's theory of cooption entirely explains this.

I should say again that these questions are not meant to detract from Marcuse's masterful philosophical analysis, but rather to point out the difficulties inherent in any Marxist aesthetic. The fact is that in the past most Marxist criticism has simply given a social thrust to accepted ideas about art, and only lately has it begun to catch up with recent advances in critical thinking.

Frankly, my own bias is antiaesthetic, and I am not convinced a Marxist aesthetic can be more useful than a non-Marxist one. I think that Marxism can sharpen one's historical sense, enabling one to see literary meanings and connections that escape more formal critics. But a Marxist aesthetic can be prescriptive or normative only by abandoning its claims to objectivity and by trying to promote, like any other literary theory, a certain kind of politics and political writing. Its value, then, would depend on the force of its intellectual style, on its plausibility, and, mostly, on the kind of talent it fostered. Unfortunately, the last time a political movement took a stand on art, in favor of proletarian literature, the results furnished a lesson in what to avoid. But this does not rule out a political art for the future, for if we have learned anything it is that good writing can be stimulated by bad theories.

America. Stephen Spender's essay on Americanization will take its place I'm sure in the long line of studies of the American character by distinguished European writers. Its easy tone and loose organization are deceptive, making the piece seem more casual than it really is. But many of Spender's connections are quite striking, particularly those between the most critical and the most complacent cultural attitudes, such as the deeply rooted Americanism of the current variety of anti–Americanism, and the cultivation of personality by those who resist as well as those who yield to the pressures or seductions of the market.

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Perhaps the most intriguing question, implicit in Spender's entire piece, is why America has to have a regular checkup, as though it were sick, in order to be "understood." Why aren't we constantly rediscovering the real England, the real France? The only other "unknown" is China, mostly because, unlike America, it has been underexposed.

Spender's comments on the "nowness" of American life are not entirely new, but he does relate our historical myopia to many aspects of our cultural and political tensions today. And there is here, too, a clue to the reason why America is thought of as an enigma: in the picture of the country as the Utopia of the present, as distinguished from Europe, whose Utopia lies in its past, and to extend the metaphor, from the Communist countries which have expropriated the Utopianism of the future. True, Europe is in a sense America's past, and its future is the future of the entire world. But that is not the same as having a past and a future built into America's own idea of itself. And one of the effects of not having an historical consciousness is to widen the gap between the American myth and the American reality. Because tradition-bound Europe basks in the past, its myth of itself is not so easily confused with its role today. Similarly, in the Communist countries, the myths of the Eastern satellites are transparent because they are mostly imposed on them, while those of new societies like Cuba are clearly inherited. And as for the Soviet Union, there is even less difficulty in separating the myth from the reality because both have hardened into a relatively rigid society and a frozen doctrine.

America, however, like a fictional character who has no live past and only an invented future, is less bound than other societies either by its traditions or its vision of where it should be going. As a result, the country seems to be free to move constantly in opposite directions. And hence the almost absurd combination of self-confident power and self-questioning guilt, for example, both of which are made possible by the absence of restraints normally imposed by national habits or a governing sense of political role. Where else could we see both the extravagant use of power as in Vietnam and the flood of self-criticism which has almost drowned the national will? Where else so much affluence and poverty, so much tolerance and so much racism, so much freedom and so much control, so much order and so much chaos?

Insofar as America has any idea of the future, it is really an extension of the present, that is, a further expansion of technology — which is actually the blueprint of the futurologists, the academicians of the American legend. But the irony is that American technology, rationalism, "problem-solving," as Spender puts it, serve as the model for the socialist dream in more backward countries. Socialism, Lenin said, is Soviet power plus electrification. From this perspective, America appears to some people to be a revolutionary society. On the other hand, most radicals think of this country as a conservative stronghold. Perhaps the truth is that it is both, in constantly shifting and unpredictable proportions, a freaky society committed both to change and to maintaining things as they are, keeping us guessing all the time, and never satisfying either radicals or conservatives. **W. P.**

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Stephen Spender

AMERICANIZATION

I

Edmund Wilson noted, in *A Piece of My Mind,* that the term "Americanization" had undergone various changes. He began with a letter of Jefferson's, written in 1797, in which Jefferson wrote of parties who charge each other "with being governed by attachment to this or that of the belligerent nations, rather than the dictates of reason and pure Americanism." A century later, in 1899, Theodore Roosevelt wrote to William Archer that "Americanism" meant "to treat an American on his worth as a man, and to disregard absolutely whether he be of English, German, Irish or any other nation; whether he be of Catholic or Protestant faith." This is the official and public American Dream. Later, Theodore Roosevelt discussed "Americanism" as though it included all the freedoms, privileges, rights and advantages of democracy. Opposite to it was un-Americanism, which meant "government by plutocracy or government by a mob."

But after the First World War Theodore Roosevelt gave "Americanism" a different emphasis. Confronted by the Russian Revolution, he pronounced that there could be no "Americanism" under the Red Flag. Edmund Wilson ends by quoting the younger Theodore Roosevelt, who called a meeting on 3 March 1920 "at which it was decided to thoroughly Americanize all war veterans, then to utilize them in the work of making good citizens of the foreign-born of the States." The change is obvious. But that noun "Americanism" once had an aura of Republican reason and the ideal.

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Americanism, Americanize, Americanization. These words mean different things to Americans and to Europeans. In fact, if one is English, one only has to read them to have the impression of obverse and reverse — the two sides of a common-language-medal — the same words meaning opposites to opposite peoples. In English, an "Americanism" is not an ideal goal for Americans but an American usage threatening the integrity of the English language. "Americanization," the process of "Americanizing," is the shadow of a future in which the world becomes America. For Europeans, the deepest fear is of the dissolution of European methods and ways of thinking, and of the European past, into the American present.

This undefined fear haunts books like *American Notes* and *Martin Chuzzlewit.* It is not confined to the English, in fact it has been more lucidly propounded by certain French writers. For the English retain a stubborn hope that they can fight back. The English have won many a battle against Americanism on the playing fields of the common language.

II

It was a Frenchman, Paul Valéry, who observed, after the First World War, that it was the ambition of Europe to be governed by an American committee. But long before this, in the early eighteen-fifties, Baudelaire, in his journal entitled *Fusées,* characterized Americanization as a symptom of the approaching end of the civilized world (by which he means France):

> The world is coming to an end. The only reason for its survival is that it exists. What a feeble reason compared with those that argue the opposite, particularly this one: "What, under Heaven, does the world have, from now on, to do?" Even supposing that it continued to exist materially, would this existence be worthy of the name and of the Historical Dictionary? I don't mean that the world will be reduced to the comic-opera disorders of South American Republics, or that we shall perhaps revert to the condition of savages and roam across the grassy ruins of our civilization, gun in hand, looking for food. No; for such adventures would imply a certain vital energy still, echo of earlier ages. A new example, and new victims of inexorable moral laws, we shall perish as a consequence of the means by which we have sought to live. Mechanization will have Amer-

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> icanized us to such a degree, Progress will have so atrophied the spiritual side of our natures, that nothing among all the sanguinary dreams, anti-natural and sacrilegious, of the Utopians, will compare with the result. I appeal to every thinking man to show me what remains of life. . . . The time will come when humanity, like an avenging ogre, will snatch the last morsel from those who believe themselves to be the legitimate heirs of revolution.

Baudelaire goes on to predict that the republics will fall because they are not directed by "holy men," or by "certain aristocrats." However, the real ruin will result from "the degradation of the human heart." There will be a "pitiless wisdom which condemns everything except money," including even the most criminal pleasures of the flesh.

Here Baudelaire is mainly concerned of course with attacking his old enemy the bourgeois. Nevertheless "Americanization" epitomizes for him the idea of a world from which aristocratic and sacramental ideals have been subtracted.

One can agree that a bourgeois, or, for that matter, a socialist future, with no aims or ideals except those of technological advancement, would be a vicious circle of suppliers and consumers, centralized government and people looked on as "social units." The symbol for such a world would be a glittering serpent with its tail trapped in its Midas mouth which changed even sinful flesh to gold.

In Baudelaire's view the things with which the nineteenth-century bourgeois surrounded himself superseded religious and (to use a Forsterian phrase) "invisible" values. The only experience left was of boredom — "ennui."

Baudelaire's view of the Americanized future was, of course, melodramatic. He anticipated a world so far fallen from grace that it was below dis-grace also: dis-grace implying a spiritual awareness of the loss of grace. In such a world it would be as nearly impossible to be damned as to be saved. For to attain damnation would show a certain degree of moral consciousness. This reified, thingified, world would die of spiritual inanition. Or, rather, the remnants of humanity (*poètes maudits,* students, etc.) would rise up and tear it to pieces.

The best testimonies that this feeling of aggression against the community often changed to aggression against themselves, are the suicides of several American poets.

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(I insert today, 9 January 1972, this parenthesis occasioned by the suicide yesterday of John Berryman, one of the great poets of his particularly tragic American generation. His posthumous voice supports, over a hundred years later, the view of Baudelaire:

> Life, friends, is boring. We must not say so.
> After all, the sky flashes, the great sea yearns,
> we ourselves flash and yearn,
> and moreover my mother told me as a boy
> (repeatingly) 'Ever to confess you're bored
> means you have no
>
> Inner Resources.' I conclude now I have no
> inner resources, because I am heavy bored.)

So for Baudelaire "Americanization" signified the culmination of a process far advanced in Europe in which all other values were superseded by those of "Progress," and where revolution and utopianism had only led to the bourgeois society. America was that part of the world where the European materialist revolution raced forward without hindrance.

The idea of America as a place where there were no activities but the practical, no values but the utilitarian, was advanced by Chateaubriand in his account of his journey to America in 1792. This chapter of *Mémoires d'outre tombe* was written with considerable hindsight in 1822, and revised in 1849. It is not just the ideas of a very young man who went to America on a madcap scheme of finding the Northwest Passage — and who returned to France after seven months. It is Chateaubriand's view of America formed over a number of years, and corrected by the opinions of friends, and further modified, in parts, after he had read de Tocqueville.

Chateaubriand is struck by the same characteristics as those which made Americanization seem the end of the world to Baudelaire. "It is no use," he writes,

> looking in the United States for qualities which distinguish men from other species of creation, for that which is the quintessential immortality (*extrait de l'immortalité*) in him and the ornament of

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> his days: letters are unknown in the United States. The American has replaced intellectual preoccupation with practical activities. Don't though deduce from his mediocrity in the arts that he is inferior. For it is not to these things that he has paid attention. Thrown for different reasons on a desert soil, agriculture and business have been the objects of his attention; before thinking he must live.

However Americans are not to be regarded just as emigrant Europeans who have gone to a new and empty continent — inhabited only by tribes of wild Indians — and who have become preoccupied with practical tasks to the exclusion of everything else, because they are obliged by circumstances to act before they can think. They are the consummation of a stage of history already arrived at:

> These citizens of the New World have taken their place among the nations at the moment when political ideas entered the ascendancy. That is why they undergo such rapid transformation.

They are the principle of transformation incarnate. It is as though part of Europe, rapidly changing and revolutionary-political, had become detached and a separate entity, which developed nothing but the qualities latent in a perpetually evolving society. Chateaubriand appears to see America as *La Révolution permanente* in contrast to *la société permanente* which is Europe:

> it seems impracticable for the permanent society to exist among them, the Americans, on the one hand because of the extreme boredom [*ennui!*] felt by individuals, on the other, because of that impossibility of staying in one place, and the necessity to move on, which dominates them. For no one remains fixed if his household gods are nomads. Situated on the highway of oceans, and in the avant garde of opinions as new as his country, the American seems to have inherited from Columbus rather the necessity of discovering new universes, than of creating them.

III

America embodied the truth that the "permanent society" was already dying in Europe. But if the world expected that a civilization like the European would emerge there, it was wrong. The United States had arrived too late on the scene to achieve the civilization of fixed values which would counterbalance the European past. In

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this respect America was like one of those countries — Germany or Japan — whose governments try to build up an empire after the empire-building stage of history has passed. It was too late for the civilization which was already declining in Europe.

I am not forgetting that there was a New England culture of Emerson, Hawthorne and Melville; of Boston and Concord; of white painted churches with wooden spires, pointed above the village green, and shaded from the uniform white-blue blazing sky by elms; of all that glassware, silverware, woodwork of grandfather clocks and spinning wheels and spindle chairs; and of family portraits by American "primitives." But when one sees these today in the museums, or in perfectly preserved villages just off the motorway, with schoolroom, village bakery, courthouse and the stocks — all produceable on payment of a small fee and perhaps with a shop where one can buy cookies made according to an old recipe and served by a lady in Quaker dress — does not it all have the glazed look of a paralysed sparrow under the hypnotic glare of a boa constrictor — the great American Future?

Americas were wiped out by immigration which was itself a symptom of the principle of "rapid transformation." Each new transformation inundated or buried previous ones. Some earlier phases — for example the New England transcendental or the Southern Agrarian — have a traditional look: but their connection with later Americas is by no means convincing. In fact the American past when it is revealed seems dug up. Those who go in search of it, admirable though they may be, cannot altogether avoid the appearance of exhumers with pickaxe and shovel levering a candle-lit transcendentalist or Southern corpse from a murky grave.

So America is contemporary with itself in a way that no other country has been. Each American transformation, shut off from previous ones by completely changed circumstances, has been walled within its one or two generations. This time-span might be compared to a room with a window looking onto a blank future, a locked door which shuts out the past, and one or two small pictures on the wall — a New England village, a Southern plantation — which evoke sentimental images with which the present life, within the room, has no connection.

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In his book *The 20's,* Frederick J. Hoffman cites Gertrude Stein who characterizes a "real American" as "one whose tradition it has taken scarcely sixty years to create. We need only realise our grandparents, and know ourselves and our history is complete." She thinks that "big" historic events, such as war, increase the sense of contemporaneity. Hoffman quotes from *The Making of Americans:*

> This then the contemporary recognition, because of the academic thing known as war having been forced to become contemporary made everyone not only contemporary in act not only contemporary in thought but contemporary in self-consciousness made every one contemporary with the modern composition.

The past, in such a view, is a parenthesis within contemporary subjective consciousness.

Hoffman observes, "as for the American past, writers in the 1920's were concerned for the most part to make it serve their own ends." Howard Mumford Jones, in the *Theory of American Literature* (1948), wrote that the aim of the new American writers was to "rewrite the story of American letters in values known only to the twentieth century."

Gertrude Stein need not have brought the war into her argument. At most times in American history, ever since the earliest beginnings, the bigness of the American "now" has either obliterated or absorbed into itself the past.

American Nowness exploits the truism that the past can only attain consciousness through the minds of contemporaries; European Pastness exploits the truism that the immensely greater part of human consciousness is the works of the dead. To be conscious only of the present — or of the past only insofar as it is useful to the present — is to have consciousness confined within the collective subjectivity of a particular generation which happens, by the accident of birth, to be alive at a particular moment.

To have a consciousness which is a vehicle of the past is to get outside the current subjective contemporaneity into the wider objectivity of past consciousness. Of course the past does not survive except in those fragments which are imaginative and intellectual achievements contained in monuments, customs, books and works of

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art. These are the tradition — the past consciousness redeemed within the present. But, being redeemed, it forms a totality which encloses the consciousness of the living.

Contemporary attitudes are conditioned by so many circumstances — political, economic and merely fashionable — that however progressive and "objectively" scientific they may be, to live inside them is to shut out multiple time-points. The past is — or ought to be — the door opening onto freedom from today, a contemporary time-prison. It offers the possibility of seeing life from the point of view of that immense majority of mankind who are the dead.

The force of the tradition in Europe has simply been the presence of the past in daily life as a palpable and working influence; as though in Paris, London, Prague, and in sculptured and terraced Tuscan or Provençal or Rhineland landscapes, time-turrets were elevated from which it was possible to look down on the present.

One of the deepest causes of the resentment of Europeans by American visitors — ranging from Emerson and Hawthorne to Edmund Wilson — is that Europeans — and particularly the English — make claims to superiority which are based on nothing more than the achievements of their ancestors. Americans have great insight into the polymorphous snobbery of Europeans about monuments which they identify with their own flesh, while they lack the spirit of those who made them. Edmund Wilson accuses Europeans of overrating both the European culture and their own interest in it. This may well be true. However the point is that in Europe the past has existed like an extra time-dimension and that, whether or not they are worthy of it or even really appreciate it, certain Europeans do live — or have lived — in that past (as have also certain Europeanized Americans).

Living in the past may be a form of decadence, an abdication from life; and perhaps the only way to live in the modern world is to be completely contemporary: *il faut être absoluement moderne.* All the same, when all is said, to see the whole of human life on this planet from the standpoint of the contemporary "continuous present" is to abdicate ninety-nine hundredths of human consciousness on this planet.

It may be that the result of the civilization of transformation

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is that the West has become split into the Americanized, who live in the present, and the Europeanized, who belong to the past without relating it to the present: though sometimes, as in the case of certain of the Italian Fascists, they show a strong desire to turn the present into the past.

W. B. Yeats believed that European civilization was divided into periods characterized by the opposites of objectivity — dominated by impersonal forces — and of subjectivity — dominated by individual men of genius. Thus the end of the Roman and the beginning of the Christian era was one in which there were few people with a strong sense of their own individuality. Yeats thought that five hundred years after the dazzlingly subjectivist Renaissance era we were moving into a similar dark end-of-civilization period dominated by impersonal forces. At the same time, exceptional people living in one historic era could belong spiritually to a quite different one. Thus in the 1890s men like Walter Pater and Lionel Johnson did not belong to their time. They were men of the Renaissance imprisoned in the present.

These are very European attitudes, even though there are certain tall, lean, lantern-jawed New Englanders who reincarnate an American past: but they are only ghosts in a society of machines. As one of them once remarked to me in a spectral accent a billion times more English than my own: "You have no idea how lonely one feels in this country if he arrived here in 1697."

But certain English, and certain Europeanized Americans (like Henry Adams, Henry James, Bernard Berenson or T. S. Eliot), can only be described as having an illness which derives from total rootedness in the European past and total rejection of the American present. They are convinced that they cannot be happy, or virtuous, or achieve greatness within the civilization whose values are entirely contemporary. This is the illness of Hugh Selwyn Mauberley in Pound's poem of that name, a hero who represents both English decadence and the Europeanized American. He is born "in a half savage country," "out of key with his time," because he "observed the elegance of Circe's hair" — that is the tradition of Homeric antiquity "rather than the mottoes on sun-dials" — *tempus fugit* in the era of perpetual transformation.

The illness of a Mauberley is incurable, because to be cured

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would be to accept the values of the contemporary world. Americanization does offer a cure but only on its own terms which are the contemporary ones. This cure is, from the point of view of Mauberley, the disease. The alternatives are the past which has become the European illness and the present which is the American cure. It is understandable then that some American contemporaries of T. S. Eliot — notably William Carlos Williams — thought of Eliot's work from *The Waste Land* onward as a betrayal of American new life to European death and destruction. Nevertheless, it is also understandable that Europeans, confronted by the dissolution of their whole past tradition into the American contemporary consciousness, agreed with Baudelaire that Americanization signified the end of civilization.

IV

Spiro Agnew, the American vice-president, touring Southeast Asia, pronounced that it is a characteristic of Americans to believe that all problems can be solved. By this he means that traditions, customs, rituals, together with social injustices, hunger and diseases, can all be put into a package, and analyzed as "problems," to be restated in such a way that they can be met by American sociology, psychology, medicine, material aid and expertise. Having reduced them to question-and-answer procedures, they become American problems, for which American solutions can be found. This, in Southeast Asia, would mean replacing bazaars with drug stores, and converting young Buddhist monks, who wear saffron robes and carry begging bowls, into hygienic, go-ahead American youths with a standard of living.

But no! One can well imagine that the anthropologists and sociologists might send in a report from Chicago to say that the temples, religious rituals, priests, Thai princelings, etc., should remain. Indeed they should be encouraged, helped to survive by studies linking up rituals with national psychology and "the pattern of the culture." Yet if this happened, the culture, though it might continue, would be undermined by the fact that that which had continued for centuries without a reason was now being provided with a rationalization: that the continuance of the culture was encouraged because it helped provide American solutions to the problems of that part

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of the world. The past, a language of mysteries and rituals, would be translated into the present, a language of diagnoses and cures.

The idea of Americanization is usually connected in people's minds with American "know-how." It would be more exact perhaps to speak of American "know-why." American man is not so much rational man (an impossibility!) as rationalized man, who breaks his own personality down into questions for which he seeks to provide answers.

For the rest of the world, the feeling that all the values of living can be restated as sociological or psychological problems, and that all other values disappear into the one of supplying answers to them, seemed a nightmare. Yet Europeans looking at America were Caliban raging at his own face in the glass.

America confronts the world and says: "This is your future." It converts all human requirements into problems which can be answered by a consumer meeting a producer. Even mysterious and unexplained human aspirations — such as someone wishing to meet the right sexual partner — can ultimately be analyzed and reduced to the same terms of a supply meeting a demand. Being in love or believing in God can both be analyzed into "problems." Anyone who insists on the impenetrability of mysteries is himself, together with his mysteries, in need of analysis and explication. A sophisticated form of Americanization is that the rationalization can catch up even with the irrational need, find reasons for it and supply it with commercial noncommercial-seeming objects. There can be a mystery market to supply mysteries, just as there can be a consumer market of nonconsumer goods for those who dislike consumer goods!

American solutions, in selling to people, together with the product that satisfies some of their needs, the idea that they are average consumers, create Americans. For already, in being a nation made up of nationals drawn from the rest of the world, America is the model for a world in which everyone becomes American. There is no reason why the process of Americanization should not work centrifugally as well as centripetally. Instead of people from all over the world going to America and becoming American, America can go out into the world and make everyone an American.

That large numbers of people all over the world believe this might happen produces a fear of a force which they feel to be greater

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than nationality, greater even than ideology. There is a certain inevitability about Americanization. For the whole tendency of the world is towards generalized solutions of problems of living for millions of human beings who are seen in a generalized way as social and economic units. And since America has gone much further in these directions than other countries, and is also much richer, American mechanization seems the future in a way that cuts across ideologies. For example, it is generally assumed that a prosperous Soviet society would be one which had caught up with America's rate of growth, and in which the standard of living of the average Russian would be that of the average American. And it is difficult to see the ultimate future of Russia as other than becoming a second America.

In a totally Americanized world, everything would be known about everyone, and everyone, since his needs were known, could, in theory, and perhaps sometimes even in practice, be provided for. This does not mean, as it is sometimes taken to, that there would be no individuals. For an individual who is completely known in all his physical and psychological make-up may still be exceptional, even unique, just as a combination of known notes on an instrument can be unique.

The Americans are, to other nationals, the people they feel they know most about. One might almost define an American as someone whom everyone not an American thinks he knows absolutely. There is not an Eskimo, a Laplander, a Chinese, an Indian, a Dutchman, who could not give you, at the drop of a hat, a lecture on America and Americans. He would do so with an assurance that he would certainly not have if talking about Russians and Russia, Frenchmen and France, or English and England. For he would feel about the Russians and the French, for example, that they were like icebergs who — although the displayed surface might be sharply distinctive and immediately recognizable — had three quarters of their character hidden under the ocean. But America forms a remarkable iceberg which has been publicized, analyzed, made accessible to such an extent and in such detail, that it is almost impossible to believe that there is any part of it not revealed by subaqueous flood-lighting, and reflected through mirrors.

I do not at all mean that everything said about Americans by foreigners — or by Americans themselves — is true. On the contrary,

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most opinions about America are irritatingly prejudiced and misinformed. What I mean is that America with its air of knowing all the answers and believing that it can solve all problems produces an image of total knowledgeability. One consequence of this is that there seems to be a transparent quality about American life, as though everything has been put under the microscope and talked about over the loudspeakers.

V

It would be a gross simplification to say that the criterion for cultural values in America is money; in the purely financial sense this is probably less true than of Europe. The truth is that, culturally speaking, America has been a buyers' market and Europe a sellers' one; which means that, nearly always, it has been Europeans who have named the price.

Americans are often accused unjustly (when the accusation comes from Europeans) of materialism. There are, of course, conspicuously materialistic, plutocratic Americans, and there is the America of great corporations and trusts, of "deals" and corruption which is materialistic. But this, although it may be milked for cultural purposes, does not lend its character to the culture. America is not as blatantly — nor as aesthetically — materialistic as the old Europe which built Venice, Versailles, St. Peter's, etc. European materialism is — or was — aristocratic. It combined the selfishness and ostentation of the ruling class with its lack of any sense of responsibility to "the people." It could be as selfish socially as it was disinterested artistically. Those who employed the greatest architects to build, the greatest artists to adorn, a hospital or school, felt more responsible for the beauty of the building than for the comfort of the inhabitants. The ideal building of the Renaissance was one in which no one lived at all.

Europeans are in the position of heirs who, inheriting vast mansions filled with statues and canvases and gold plate and marvelous ceramics, have not had to think about the price paid, across many centuries, for these things at all. In fact the most sensitive of these heirs have been able to regard these objects as beyond price — and not to be thought of in the economic context — but as marble, painted, golden, crystal and porcelain solidified invisible values. That is why Europeans consider themselves as so spiritual and Americans as so materialist.

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Americans were in the very different position of having to buy most of these things for the price named — often with disdain and disgust combined with avarice — by Europeans. Moreover, being a democracy, Americans have often had to sell to their fellow citizens, and to city or state or academic governing bodies, the idea of culture at a price named. Americans have had to be "sold" the idea of art, before they bought art-objects. Price, though, is connected with the market, which is, by definition, shifting. The tying up of aesthetic values with money values tends to make the aesthetic values shift with those of the market, to make them "subjective" to the time. This is perhaps not true of the great masterpieces, in the Metropolitan museums and other art institutions, which have acquired the "beyond price" look — beyond the immediate values of any contemporary generation — of the Parthenon, the Vatican, and European cathedrals. All the same, there are fewer things in America to convey the idea that they are completely outside the time-box of a single generation than there are in Europe. This adds to the sense that in America aesthetic values are generation-bound. Their court of judgment is predominantly the market.

This has certain results. One is that works of art are less likely than in Europe to be regarded as standing in a relation to the past when they were made — and therefore to have intrinsic objective value unaffected by the contemporary market. Another is that there is a much greater feeling in America that the value of the work of art lies in what it "does" to the spectator (this again has the effect of enclosing the spectator within the box of the judgments and opinions of his particular time).

"I always expose myself to a work of art," said a teacher to her students at an American progressive college where I taught. The metaphor was drawn not from pornography but photography. She saw herself as a negative exposed to a painting or piece of sculpture which developed her sensibility like a photographic plate.

Metaphors of "buying" and "selling" are almost inevitable if art is looked on as the realization of an idea of a work bought which then rewards the spectator. The metaphors have been absorbed into current American vocabulary. Some years ago, sitting next to me at a performance in Cincinnati of Beethoven's A Minor Quartet, Opus 132, the local music critic murmured to me that Beethoven's Quartets had been "oversold." I heard the same reproach leveled at the

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Roman antiquities of Saint Rémy and Arles by a distinguished American lady whom I took to see them. It was a hot day and she thought that Roman antiquity and all works influenced by Roman art had been badly "oversold"; and she returned to New York on the following day. An "explication" of her thinking would probably run something like this: "Here am I, an intellectual American of acknowledged taste and sensibility, and I have been told that I shall gain a cultural experience which will have an improving effect on me, as a result of my trailing round the Teatro Antico on a hot summer afternoon. But having done so I do not recognize that the arches, columns and pediments have 'done' anything to me. I therefore conclude that their culturally therapeutic effect has been exaggerated." On the assumption that art can be valued by the developments which it produces on the sensitized film of the current spectator's sensibility, she was bearing honest and truthful witness, and if her answer, together with that of hundreds of other tourists of similar intelligence in a similar situation were fed into a computer, one would get a revised, up-to-date, contemporary evaluation of the status of Roman antiquities in Provence, which could be correlated with the expense of getting there.

My purpose in recording this anecdote is to emphasize that the lady thought that the objective value of the remains lay entirely in their contemporary effect on the subjective viewer. She did not think they might have a significance beyond and outside her, nor that if she could not absorb them, make them part of her corporeal-cultural physiology, this was a criticism of her rather than them. If they were not of contemporary use, they were no use at all. That was her point of view.

This is also the point of view, finally arrived at after the Second World War, of the respected and highly civilized American writer Edmund Wilson, stated in two books in which he "finalizes" his attitudes towards Europe and America: *Europe Without Baedeker* (1947) and, ten years later, *A Piece of My Mind*. However, before considering Mr. Wilson's rejection of the European cultural tradition as having any contemporary significance, I want, by way of contrast, to take from the early part of the century an example of a European attitude to the past which takes us back to Baudelaire in condemning all contemporary life, including that of Europeans. It is by the Ger-

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man poet and aesthete Stefan George, in a magnificent and highly evocative poem, written in his most lapidary style, entitled *Porta Nigra,* about the Roman triumphal arch at the city of Treves. It opens grandiloquently:

> Dass ich zu eurer zeit erwachen musste
> Der Ich die pracht der Treverstadt gekannt
> Da sie den ruhm der schwester Roma teilte

"That I am compelled to be awake in your time, / I who knew the wonder of the city of Treves / Which shared the fame of its sister city of Rome." The speaker is the unworthiest of the unworthy — a boy prostitute who stood at the gate and offered his perfumed body to Caesar's soldiers. But such a wretched ghost has nevertheless seen the glory that was the city of Treves, sister of Rome, and can protest to the twentieth-century visitor: "Was gelten alle dinge die ihr ruehmet"—What are the things worth that you honour?

One does not have to share the contempt of George's ghostly nancy boy Manlius (it is an attitude that leads eventually to Fascism) to see that this poem expresses a European sense of the past as overwhelming, inexplicable, withdrawn into its own time apart from the contemporary world (unrelated, and yet nevertheless continuous with it), which is very different from what is, surely, the prevailing American attitude — that the past is useful only as an asset which can be realized within the present, *Porta Nigra* only as good as the good it does to visiting tourists.

That the tradition as embodied in Europe is now of very little significance, even as a utility, to Americans is the view stated unequivocally by Edmund Wilson in his comments on Europe in *A Piece of My Mind.* Following on the remarks I have already quoted here about Europeans who overrate their cultural tradition, he goes on to record that he has "derived a good deal more benefit of the civilizing as well as of the inspirational kind from the admirable American bathroom than I have from the cathedrals of Europe." He admits the impressive "and varied beauties" of the European monuments but still he has had "more uplifting thoughts, creative and expansive visions" "while soaking in comfortable baths" than in the cathedrals. Body and spirit purge themselves, he claims, in a hot bath, leaving the mind "free to ruminate," "to plan ambitious projects." He admits

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that cathedrals "with their distant domes, their long aisles and their high groinings, do add stature to human strivings; their chapels do give privacy for prayer." But on the whole he prefers the American bathroom, which "prepares one to face the world, fortified, firm on one's feet, serene and with a mind like a diamond."

Coming from a scholar and critic who, more perhaps than any living American, has upheld civilized values, and who customarily (though not in this passage) writes in a style of eighteenth-century elegance and clarity, this is candid, amusing, leg-pulling: the last word in Edmund Wilson's long polemic against European snobbery. All the same in dismissing the European snobs he seems finally to have dismissed the objects which they are snobbish about. Unless he is subtly parodying the point of view he expresses (and the use of words like "uplifting" and "inspirational" make one suspect he might be doing this), he is, in effect, testifying to the bankruptcy of the old world as a past still acting on contemporary life. Presumably he particularly dislikes cathedrals because, with their columns and arches, they form a background against which Europeans strike their poses and stake their claims of superiority over visiting Americans. In the long drawn out dialectic of Anglo-American literary relations, it was a ploy of visiting Americans — already used by Emerson and Hawthorne — to winkle their European contemporaries out of their ruinous classical architectural shells, throw them contemptuously aside, and express their admiration only for those ruins. Mr. Wilson goes further; he rejects the cathedrals and the classical background as well. This means coming down heavily on the side of the contemporary, the temporary, the transitory, the Americanized, in the form of the water sluicing through American taps and showers. The rejection is all the more piquant because Mr. Wilson must know better than anyone that the Romans had steam baths.

Writing after 1945 Mr. Wilson is probably right in saying that the architectural and static surviving Europe is no longer even a background. Other parts of his two books suggest that what is moveable from Europe — the literary dramatic works, the music and the artists — has already been taken to America, which adds to the absurdity of those Europeans who still claim the superiority of the physical geographic grounds they literally stand on. As a European, I feel that the only thing one might possibly quarrel with him about is his

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apparent assumption that the purpose of the cathedrals was, at any time, to be "inspirational" and stimulate him to efforts the results of which would have nothing whatever to do with the spirit, mind, intellect and senses of the generations that built those edifices. One supposes he brings a different attention to cathedral architecture from that which he would bring, say, to a performance of *King Lear,* or to reading *War and Peace.* For his wonderful criticism is evidence that he does not make it a test of literary masterpieces that, while reading them, they should cause him to think of something other than the authors' meaning, "some ambitious project" of his own devising.

It is true though that by now the architectural and landscaped past of Europe has been swallowed up in the American contemporaneity just as much as those New England villages. The question is whether there are not qualities in America which will save the world from Americanization. For the world has nowhere else (unless to China) to look.

VI

Nothing could be further from Americanization than the visions of the puritan, the transcendentalist, and the "classic" American writers. They saw Americans as a new and unprecedented race — *homo Americanus,* free of the guilt of Europe, reborn as Adams and Eves on the almost unexplored continent. In the early as even in the late novels of Henry James the American is essentially an innocent. His hero of the novel of that name — *The American* — is called Newman. It is true that he expresses his innocence not in flowers, but in gold, but this scarcely matters because he is purer and younger than the corrupt and designing European aristocrats among whom he moves. The Christian name of Mr. Verver in *The Golden Bowl* is Adam.

What I call here "Americanization" meant to Herman Melville something much closer to Europeanization: and, of course, Americanization is really the effect of Europe on America.

That England, when offering delights, casts a shadow across the American soul, is the significance of two stories by Melville, "The Paradise of Bachelors" and "The Tartarus of Maids." The first of these is an artful sketch, which appeared in *Harper's Magazine* in 1855, of a banquet of lawyers — all of them bachelors — at their

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chambers in the Temple, in the city of London. Melville, carousing with these jovial lawyers, recalls that the Templars are descendants of the Knights-Templars. Here they are reduced from "carving out immortal fame in glorious battle for the Holy Land," to the "carving of roast mutton at a dinner board." Melville moralizes about this decline and sees it as symptomatic. For what place is there for the Templars today? How could they be expected to survive into the twentieth century? He visualizes: "Templars crowded in a railway train, till, stacked with steel helmet, spear and shield, the whole train looks like one elongated locomotive!"

There follows a description of the sumptuous dinner of several courses served in dishes which Melville imagines moving like artillery across the heavily furnished dining-room table. These paradisal bachelors, the nineteenth-century descendants of the Knights of old, with no wives or children to give anxious thought to, no cares or responsibilities of any kind, have, it seems, shut out from their lives "the thing called pain, the bugbear styled trouble" — those two legends seemed preposterous to their bachelor imaginations. How could men of liberal sense, ripe scholarship in the world, and spacious philosophical and convivial understanding — how could they suffer themselves to be imposed upon by such monkish fables? Pain! Trouble! As well talk of Catholic miracles. No such thing. — "Pass the sherry, sir. — Pooh, pooh! Can't be!"

This fable shows nineteenth-century England as rich, sterile, complacent, hospitable: stuffed with rich foods and surrounded with thick walls and heavy furnishings which shut out all human miseries and stifle the need for Christian charity.

In contrast to this picture of English steak-and-claret complacent self-congratulation, there follows, in "The Tartarus of Maids," a scene set in a part of New England becoming industrialized. No two things could be more different than the New England and the London shown here, and yet they are conspiratorially and darkly related. There is a sinister gorge among mountains with features malignly named: the Black Notch, Devil's Dungeon, the Mad Maid's Bellow Pipe, Blood River, etc. The sexuality is of the taunting kind which challenges the middle-class reader to admit his own dirty-mindedness if he thinks evil when reading these names. Near the bottom of the valley there is a large, white-washed building, a paper mill. The

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narrator, who visits it, is, significantly, a seedsman. He has, he tells us, distributed his seeds "through all of the Eastern and Northern states," and even let some fall "into the far soil of the Missouri and the Carolinas." He requires paper for the envelopes into which he puts his seeds. The narrator is the same American who visited the London Templars, of whom he is strongly reminded when he visits this place in America which has been assaulted by mechanization. Blood River through "inverted similitude" calls to mind "the sweet, tranquil Temple garden with the Thames bordering its green meadows." And he involuntarily asks himself: "Who are the gay bachelors?"

Melville makes us feel that this vignette of the American Maids in their factory which withers their spontaneous life is the "identical opposite" of the sumptuous abode of the Bachelors of the Temple Chambers:

> At rows of blank-looking counters sat rows of blank-looking girls, with blank, white folders in their blank hands, all blankly folding blank paper.

Every action of the Maids in the factory is seen as the destruction of their innocence. The machinery is a hideous parody of the sexual act. A "vertical thing like a piston periodically rising and falling" is fed by a girl, whose cheek is pale and bloodless, with paper on which it stamps the impress of a wreath of roses.

In these somber parables Melville appears to envision the opposites of a luxurious, selfish, sterile England and an America desexed by the combination of American puritanism and imported European technology. Connecting English castrated stifling bourgeois luxury and American withered innocence is the fact that the director of the paper factory, like the Templars, is a bachelor. The puritan industrialized American is the identical opposite of the decadent gay London Templar.

Americanization is, as I say, Europeanization gone to America where it flourishes, yet the American fear of Europe is not the counterpart of the European fear of America. Americans fear the European past; Europeans fear the American future. It is true that this future is felt to be almost as concrete and palpable as the past, being

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a certainty staring the rest of the world in the face for a hundred and fifty odd years. (There are in fact two American futures: one, the immense material potentiality of power and wealth, the other the uncertain spiritual future.) However, the American future remained a growing menace for Europe, while, for Americans, the European past spelled entanglement. Culturally it had snared American writers, through the English language and tradition, unless they deliberately freed themselves from it. Historically it involved America in European tragedies — for example two world wars.

James, as I have pointed out, sees Americans as less corrupt than Europeans, though they are tainted by their money: and at the end the taint becomes, in his unfinished novel *The Ivory Tower,* vile. However it is a masculine taint. American wealth is gain, rape, something torn out of the earth or from other men, or the results of vile operations in unnameable materials. The origins of the wealth of Newman, Mr. Verver and the young Bostonian heir Chad are kept secret, partly because American utilities in James's novels seem to be so basely utilitarian that they are, one supposes, mere utensils — pots or pans or worse (I always imagine Mrs. Newsome, Chad's mother, in *The Ambassadors,* sitting on a pile of chamber pots), but even more because "business," manufacturing, are men's secrets.

The gainers from this concealment are not James's readers but his heroines. The strand connecting them with guilt by association with the paternal sources of money has been neatly severed, and his Daisies and Millies and Maggies emerge as innocent victims. On the other hand, James associates European wealth with the more odious traits of women: their avarice, intrigue and willingness to use their own bodies for the purpose of gaining wealth is shown in the portraits of two English young women, Kate Croy and Charlotte.

Edmund Wilson, coming to England in 1945 as *New Yorker* correspondent, found James's account, in *The Wings of the Dove,* of the relations between Americans and English "deadly" in its exactitude; and he contrasts the "American disinterested idealism, indiscriminate amiability and carelessness about money," with "the desperate materialism that is implied by position in England." Money for the Americans, Wilson writes, "is a medium, a condition of life like air. But with the English it always means property." Wilson was surprised to find so much confirmation in English life of the English

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character as portrayed by English novelists like Thackeray, Dickens and Samuel Butler, whose works he had read in his youth with incredulity, supposing them to be "half fairy tales like Homer." He found in London, as in these novels of a past era,

> basic English qualities, with which, after nearly two hundred years, Americans have to reckon again: the passion for social privilege, the rapacious appetite for property, the egoism that damns one's neighbour, the dependence on inherited advantages, and the almost equally deep-fibred instinct, often not deliberate or conscious, to make all these appear forms of virtue.

Twenty years later in the introduction to a new edition of his book, he reports that the first edition was unfavorably received in England, and he cites the similar experience of Hawthorne when he received the English notices of *Our Old Home*. Hawthorne reported that the "monstrosity of the self-conceit" of the English was such that "anything short of unlimited admiration impresses them as malicious caricature."

From Hawthorne to Wilson 1966 probably completes a cycle, for the ascendency of America is now so great that Americans no longer need protecting against English wiles. The process which began as Europeanization gone to America and returned to Europe as Americanization is now complete. The English are more in need of warning against America than Americans of warning against England, but beyond this there are evils common to both cultures and the question for today is whether the last problem to be solved by Americans will not be that of Americanization.

This question suggests itself because Americans include the most anti-American people in the world, the harshest critics of their country. The world today is flooded with Americans who set out to make themselves the "opposites" of their idea of a stereotyped American. The "good American" is conformist so they refuse to conform; he is patriotic so they attack everything about their own country; he is hygienic so they make a cult of dirt; he wants property so they abjure it; he wants success so they seek failure; he is respectable and discreet so they are outrageous, obscene and exhibitionistically promiscuous.

It would be much too easy to dismiss this anti-Americanism as just another way of being American. On the other hand it has many

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precedents. Many of the old Beatniks and new Hippies are sincere and generous, but so were their parents. The difficulty is that the things that do distinguish them too often seem religiously heretical throw-backs to earlier American sects (the Shakers, the Mormons, etc.), or bourgeois deviations (spending money to make yourself look stagily revolutionary), or they are inconsistent (making a publicity success of being a drop-out). When the hippies, etc., go abroad to Europe or India they immediately become the leaders of fashions which are transparently American and which reduce the role of their admirers to that of hangers-on. In this respect they are only a variant of other crazed American human exports, for instance the thousands of jazzed-up temporary expatriates of the 1920s. Moreover, the whole drug and sex cult is built on endless rationalization — forever explaining to themselves and others the reasons why they behave as they do and the benefits they propose to get out of it. In this respect the cult is simply an extension of the idea that everyone's supreme aim in life is self-fulfillment and happiness and that one is entitled to wreck marriages, children and certainly one's own health and sanity in pursuit of this. After all, group sex is only a speeding up of the process of easy divorce. Instead of having one wife or husband quickly superseded by others who are supposed to promote greater happiness, one has and is had by all of them at once. Therapeutic self-consciousness characterizes all this. As my friend Glenway Westcott observed, despite all the deliberate unwashedness, one has the impression of a sterilized orgy.

Such attitudes cannot be relied on. The young generation is poor but not under a vow of poverty. It just happens that the things the older generations like cost money, but this doesn't mean that the drugs, dress style, motorcycles, etc., of the young generation don't. It is true that many of the young generation live very miserably. But so did many of the expatriates who went to Paris in the twenties: Ernest Hemingway and Henry Miller, for example.

I am not meaning here to attack the young. What concerns me is whether a society in which people are so self-conscious, so given to rationalizing all their actions, so subjective (if one can use the word subjective to apply to the group as well as the individual) can really change and not remain itself always in the position of finding solutions to problems by the very simple process of giving them a new look.

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The key to the problem seems to me to lie in the concept of the "drop-out." There have always been young Americans who dislike the society very much and do not want to fit into any of its categories of acceptability. Accordingly they have cultivated failure and have dropped out of the society. But in a society which attaches so much importance to youth a good-looking or hirsute young drop-out is that paradoxical thing, a successful failure. Whole generations of young people have been successful failures, choosing Bohemian lives in Greenwich Village or Old Town Chicago, or going to Woodstock and other Pop Festivals. The drop-out has also been a pick-up: promoted and advertised by the glamor of youth. At the same time it is quite clear that certain of these photographed, televised, interviewed and publicized members of each new generation really do in every way drop out when they lose their youth, unless they pass the test of success on some other level. The choice that confronts them is not really between success and failure but between the kind of success which is destroying of everything except publicity and money values and the kind of success in which the values of personal relations and a critical attitude toward the society are maintained.

It may seem paradoxical to suggest that the greatest achievement of some Beatniks, Hippies and Pop artists is that they have managed to turn their contempt for values of success and their stubborn insistence on clinging to their own most personal attitudes and feelings into unprecedented success. They have not allowed themselves to become depersonalized by publicity; on the contrary, they have exploited it as the medium of expression of their personal values. It is true that this has sometimes turned them into public "personalities." Yet there is a great difference between the "personalities" of those who, like Hemingway and Scott Fitzgerald, became swallowed up in their own legend while they were still alive, and those like Norman Mailer and Allen Ginsberg who have responded in kind to the conditions of publicity and success imposed on them and yet have remained warmly and accessibly themselves.

Ever since Whitman's day certain American poets have played out the dramas of their private lives in public with tragic fervor; as though they thought it their duty not only to write their poetry but to pitch their personal lives against the background of the mechanized society. In the twentieth century half a dozen American poets — from Hart Crane to Sylvia Plath and John Berryman — have played out

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to the extremist end — their violent deaths — the drama in which the modern world — America — stands for the destruction of values which the poet affirms in his imagination and his flesh.

It would be oversimplifying to divide American poets into "romantics" and "confessionalists," like Byron or Shelley, who made the mistake of living out their poetic feelings, and paid for the error with their lives, and those like Eliot who adopted a classical stance and made a cult of impersonality. For Eliot, despite his famous theory about the necessity of using poetry as a means of escaping from the poet's personality, had attitudes to poetry which, at any rate when he was young, he lived out. These merged with his critical polemics and his views about religion and culture. Pound shared Eliot's ideas that poems should be objective, hard, detached; yet the mistaken political views, for which he paid so cruelly, were an extension of his life-commitment to poetry and criticism.

There is a continuous line of American artists whose commitment to their art and to attitudes of life inseparable from it is both personal and public. This explains, I think, the position of poets — as apart from their poetry — in American life. But of course they would not have this real, though limited position, but for the fact that it corresponds to the feelings of people whose aspirations they express.

Unlike so many other American attitudes this is not explicable by mechanical analysis, nor is it rationalization. There is something dense, rich and impenetrable about it, some fundamental quality of American life which is the prime mover and cause of other, often mistaken activities, but is not subject to the criticism with which they can be met. It is American but has as little to do with Americanization as Jesus Christ has to with *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

This deepest thing in American life is the consciousness of the need for redemption. That it exists explains, I think, many other things, for instance, the willingness of Americans to listen to criticism which undermines their unwillingness to listen to it. A historic example is James's tour of American women's campuses in 1904 in which he told his audiences that they had no manners and less language. In his writings describing this tour he commented on the incomprehension of the young ladies he addressed, finding illustration of their rudeness in their surly blankness. What he did not remark on was the politeness underlying the rudeness: the politeness of audiences

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listening to him because many of those present thought that what he said was true and that they might learn from it.

At the end there is in America some quality of genuineness which underlies the "phoniness"; which even may be the cause of it and which may result in Americans recognizing what is "phony." For example, it might be said that the sending of food parcels to people all over the world after the war was, like so much other American charity, and like the Marshall Plan, in some respects a not completely disinterested exercise in public relations. Yet what is redemptive about such American national gestures is firstly the willingness to admit that they are not all they pretend to be and secondly the fact that underneath it all, they are simple expressions of an American generosity which astonished the rest of the world and which cannot be explained except as something new which emerged together with the American national character. There is something then in America which cannot be explained away and which is not just some form of commercialization in terms of which all problems are analyzed and provided with answers. Americans feel critical of the motives and methods of their own society, their own existence even. This feeling seems entirely lacking in the rest of the world and enables America to retain its newness, its innocence and even, at the end of the huge tunnel of the vulgar and factitious, its mystery.

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Herbert Marcuse

ART AND REVOLUTION

At precisely this stage, the radical effort to sustain and intensify the "power of the negative," the subversive potential of art, must sustain and intensify the *alienating* power of art: the aesthetic form, in which alone the radical force of art becomes communicable.

In his essay "Die Phantasie im Spätkapitalismus und die Kulturrevolution," Peter Schneider calls this recapture of the aesthetic transcendence the "propagandistic function of art":

> Propagandistic art would seek in the recorded dream history [*Wunschgeschichte*] of mankind the utopian images, would free them from the distorted forms which were imposed upon them by the material conditions of life, and show to these dreams [*Wünschen*] the road to realization which now, finally, has become possible. . . . The aesthetic of this art should be the strategy of dream realization.[1]

This strategy of realization, precisely because it is to be that of a dream, can never be "complete," never be a translation into reality, which would make art into a psychoanalytic process. Realization rather means finding the *aesthetic* forms which can communicate the possibilities of a liberating transformation of the technical and natural environment. But here, too, the distance between art and practice, the dissociation of the former from the latter, remains.

At the time between the two World Wars, where the protest seemed to be directly translatable into action, joined to action, where the shattering of the aesthetic form seemed to be the response to the revolutionary forces in action, Antonin Artaud formulated the

1. G. Warren Nutter, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security, *New York Times,* March 23, 1971.

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program for the abolition of art: "En finir avec les chefs-d'oeuvres"; art must become the concern of the masses (*la foule*), must be an affair of the streets, and above all, of the organism, the body, of nature. Thus, it would *move* men, would move things, for: "il faut que les choses crèvent pour repartir et recommencer." The serpent moves to the tones of the music not because of their "spiritual content" but because their vibrations communicate themselves through the earth to the serpent's entire body. Art has cut off this communication and "deprived a gesture [*un geste*] from its repercussion in the organism": this unity with nature must be restored: "beneath the poetry of text, there is a poetry *tout court,* without form and without text." This natural poetry must be recaptured which is still present in the eternal myths of mankind (such as "beneath the text" in Sophocles' *Oedipus*) and in the magic of the primitives: its rediscovery is prerequisite for the liberation of man. For "we are not free, and the sky can still fall on our head. And the theater is made first of all in order to teach us all this.[2] To attain this goal, the theater must leave the stage and go on the street, to the masses. And it must *shock,* cruelly shock and *shatter* the complacent consciousness and unconscious.

> . . . [a theater] where violent physical images crush and hypnotize the sensibility of the spectator, seized in the theater as by a whirlwind of superior forces.

Even at the time when Artaud wrote, the "superior forces" were of a very different kind, and they seized man, not to liberate but rather to enslave and destroy him more effectively. And today, what possible language, what possible image can crush and hypnotize minds and bodies which live in peaceful coexistence with (and even profiting from) genocide, torture and poison? And if Artaud wants a "constant sonorization: sounds and noises and cries, first for their quality of vibration and then for that which they represent," we ask: has not the audience, even the "natural" audience on the streets, long since become familiar with the violent noises, cries, which are the daily equipment of the mass media, sports, highways, places of recreation? They do not break the oppressive familiarity with destruction; they reproduce it.

2. Antonin Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son double* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), pp. 113, 119, 121, 123, 124, 126 (written in 1933).

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The German writer Peter Handke blasted the "ekelhafte Unwahrheit von Ernsthaftigkeiten im Spielraum [the loathsome untruth of seriousness in play]."[3] This indictment is not an attempt to keep politics out of the theater, but to indicate the form in which it can find expression. The indictment cannot be upheld with respect to Greek tragedy, to Shakespeare, Racine, Kleist, Ibsen, Brecht, Beckett: there, by virtue of the aesthetic form, the "play" creates its own universe of "seriousness" which is *not* that of the given reality, but rather its negation. But the indictment holds for the guerrilla theater of today: it is a *contradictio in adjecto;* altogether different from the Chinese (regardless of whether it was played on or after the Long March); there, the theater did not take place in a "universe of play"; it was part of a revolution in actual process, and established, as an episode, the identity between the players and the fighters: unity of the space of the play and the space of the revolution.

The Living Theatre may serve as an example of self-defeating purpose.[4] It makes a systematic attempt to unite the theater and the Revolution, the play and the battle, bodily and spiritual liberation, individual internal and social external change. But this union is shrouded in mysticism: "the Kabbalah, Tantric and Hasidic teaching, the I Ching, and other sources." The mixture of Marxism and mysticism, of Lenin and Dr. R. D. Laing does not work; it vitiates the political impulse. The liberation of the body, the sexual revolution, becoming a ritual to be performed ("the rite of universal intercourse"), loses its place in the political revolution: if sex is a voyage to God, it can be tolerated even in extreme forms. The revolution of love, the nonviolent revolution, is no serious threat; the powers that be have always been capable of coping with the forces of love. The radical desublimation which takes place in the theater, *as* theater, is organized, arranged, performed desublimation — it is close to turning into its opposite.[5]

3. Quoted in Yark Karsunke, "Die Strasse und das Theater," in *Kursbuch* 20, 1969, p. 67.

4. See *Paradise Now: Collective Creation of the Living Theatre,* written down by Judith Melina and Julian Beck (Random House).

5. In the summer of 1971, the Living Theatre group that had been playing before the wretched of the earth in Brazil was incarcerated by the fascist government. There, in the midst of the terror which is the life of the people, and which precluded any integration into the established order, even the mystified liberation play seemed a threat to the regimen. I wish to express my solidarity with Judith Malina and Julian Beck and their group; my criticism is fraternal, since we share the same struggle.

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Untruth is the fate of the unsublimated, direct representation. Here, the "illusory" character of art is not abolished but doubled: the players only play the actions they want to demonstrate, and this action itself is unreal, is play.

The distinction between an internal revolution of the aesthetic form and its destruction, between authentic and contrived directness (a distinction based on the tension between art and reality), has also become decisive in the development (and function) of "living music," "natural music." It is as if the cultural revolution had fulfilled Artaud's demand that, in a literal sense, music move the body, thereby drawing nature into the rebellion. Life music has indeed an authentic basis: *black music* as the cry and song of the slaves and the ghettos.[6] In this music, the very life and death of black men and women are lived again: the music *is* body; the aesthetic form is the "gesture" of pain, sorrow, indictment. With the takeover by the whites, a significant change occurs: white "rock" is what its black paradigm is *not,* namely, *performance.* It is as if the crying and shouting, the jumping and playing, now take place in an artificial, organized space; that they are directed toward a (sympathetic) *audience.* What had been part of the permanence of life now becomes a concert, festival, a disc in the making. "The group" becomes a fixed entity (*verdinglicht*), absorbing the individuals; it is "totalitarian" in the way in which it overwhelms individual consciousness and mobilizes a collective unconscious which remains without social foundation.

And as this music loses its radical impact, it tends to massification: the listeners and coperformers in the audience are masses streaming to a spectacle, a performance.

6. Pierre Lere analyzes the dialectic of this black music in his article "Free Jazz: Évolution ou Révolution": ". . . the liberty of the musical forms is only the aesthetic translation of the will to social liberation. Transcending the tonal framework of the theme, the musician finds himself in a position of freedom. This search for freedom is translated into atonal musicality; it defines a modal climate where the Black expresses a new order. The melodic line becomes the medium of communication between an initial order which is rejected and a final order which is hoped for. The frustrating possession of the one, joined with the liberating attainment of the other, establishes a rupture in between the Weft of harmony which gives way to an aesthetic of the cry [*esthétique du cri*]. This cry, the characteristic resonant [*sonore*] element of "free music," born in an exasperated tension, announces the violent rupture with the established white order and translates the advancing [*promotrice*] violence of a new black order" (*Revue d'Esthétique,* vols. 3–4, 1970, pp. 320, 321).

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True, in this spectacle, the audience actively participates: the music *moves* their bodies, makes them "natural." But their (literally) electrical excitation often assumes the features of hysteria. The aggressive force of the endlessly repeated hammering rhythm (the variations of which do not open another dimension of music), the squeezing dissonances, the standardized "frozen" distortions, the noise level in general — is it not the force of frustration?[7] And the identical gestures, the twisting and shaking of bodies which rarely (if ever) really touch each other — it seems like treading on the spot, it does not get you anywhere except into a mass soon to disperse. This music is, in a literal sense, *imitation, mimesis* of effective aggression: it is, moreover, another case of *catharsis:* group therapy which, temporarily, removes inhibitions. Liberation remains a private affair.

The tension between art and revolution seems irreducible. Art itself, in practice, cannot change reality, and art cannot submit to the actual requirements of the revolution without denying itself. But art can and will draw its inspirations, and its very form, from the then prevailing revolutionary movement — for revolution is in the substance of art. The historical substance of art asserts itself in all modes of alienation; it precludes any notion that recapturing the aesthetic form today could mean revival of classicism, romanticism or any other traditional form. Does an analysis of the social reality allow any indication as to art forms which would respond to the revolutionary potential in the contemporary world?

According to Adorno, art responds to the total character of repression and administration with total alienation. The highly intellectual, constructivist and at the same time spontaneous-formless music of John Cage, Stockhausen, Pierre Boulez, may be the extreme examples.

But has this effort already reached the point of no return, that is, the point where the *oeuvre* drops out of the dimension of alienation, of *formed* negation and contradiction, and turns into a sound

7. The frustration behind the noisy aggression is revealed very neatly in a statement by Grace Slick of the "Jefferson Airplane" group, reported in *The New York Times Magazine* (October 18, 1970): "Our eternal goal in life, Grace says, absolutely deadpan, is to get louder."

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game, language game — harmless and without commitment, shock which no longer shocks, and thus succumbing?

The radical literature which speaks in formless semispontaneity and directness loses with the aesthetic form the political content, while this content erupts in the most highly formed poems of Allen Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti. The most uncompromising, most extreme indictment has found expression in a work which precisely because of its radicalism repels the political sphere: in the work of Samuel Beckett, there is no hope which can be translated into political terms, the aesthetic form excludes all accommodation and leaves literature as literature. And as literature, the work carries one single message: to make an end with things as they are. Similarly, the revolution is in Bertolt Brecht's most perfect lyric rather than in his political plays, and in Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* rather than in today's antifascist opera.

This is the passing of antiart, the reemergence of form. And with it we find a new expression of the inherently subversive qualities of the aesthetic dimension, especially beauty as the sensuous appearance of the idea of freedom. The delight of beauty and the horror of politics; Brecht has condensed it in five lines:

Within me there is a struggle between
The delight about the blooming apple tree
And the horror about a Hitler speech.
But only the latter
Forces me to my desk

[*Translated from the German by Reinhard Lettau*]

The image of the tree remains present in the poem which is "enforced" by a Hitler speech. The horror of that which is marks the moment of creation, is the origin of the poem which celebrates the beauty of the blooming apple tree. The political dimension remains committed to the other, the aesthetic dimension, which, in turn, assumes political value. This happens not only in the work of Brecht (who is already considered a "classic") but also in some of the radical songs of protest of today — or yesterday, especially in the lyrics and music of Bob Dylan. Beauty returns, the "soul" returns: not the one in food and "on ice" but the old and repressed one, the one that was in the *Lied,* in the melody: *cantabile.* It becomes

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the form of the subversive content, not as artificial revival, but as a "return of the repressed." The music, in its own development, carries the song to the point of rebellion where the voice, in word and pitch, *halts* the melody, the song, and turns into outcry, shout.

Junction of art and revolution in the aesthetic dimension,[8] in art itself. Art which has become capable of being political even in the (apparently) total absence of political content, where nothing remains but the poem — about what? Brecht accomplishes the miracle of making the simplest ordinary language say the unutterable: the poem invokes, for a vanishing moment, the images of a liberated world, liberated nature:

DIE LIEBENDEN

Sieh jene Kraniche in grossem Bogen!
Die Wolken, welche ihnen beigegeben
Zogen mit ihnen schon, als sie entflogen
Aus einem Leben in ein andres Leben.
In gleicher Höhe und mit gleicher Eile
Scheinen sie alle beide nur daneben.
Dass so der Kranich mit der Wolke teile
Dean schönen Himmel, den sie kurz befliegen
Dass also keiner länger hier verweile
Und keines andres sehe als das Wiegen
Des andern in dem Wind, den beide spüren
Die jetzt im Fluge beieinander liegen
So mag der Wind sie in das Nichts entführen
Wenn sie nur nicht vergehen und sich bleiben
So lange kann sie beide nichts berühren
So lange kann man sie von jedem Ort vertreiben
Wo Regen drohen oder Schüsse schallen.
So under Sonn und Monds wenig verschiedenen
Scheiben
Fliegen sie hin, einander ganz verfallen.

8. One only has to read some of the authentic-sounding poems of young activists (or former activists) in order to see how poetry, remaining poetry, can be political also today. These love poems are political as love poems: not where they are fashionably desublimated, verbal release of sexuality, but on the contrary: where the erotic energy finds sublimated, poetic expression — a poetic language becoming the outcry against that which is done to men and women who love in this society. In contrast, the union of love and subversion, the social liberation inherent in Eros is lost where the poetic language is abandoned in favor of versified (or pseudoversified) pig language. There is such a thing as pornography, namely, the sexual publicity, propaganda with the exhibitionist, marketable Eros. Today, the pig language and the glossy photography of sex have exchange value — not the romantic love poem.

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Wohin, ihr? — Nirgend hin. — Von wem davon? —
Von allen.
Ihr fragt, wie lange sind sie schon beisammen?
Seit kurzem. — Und wann werden sie sich trennen?
— Bald.
So scheint die Liebe Liebenden ein Halt.[9]

THE LOVERS

See those cranes in their wide sweep!
See the clouds given to be at their side
Traveling with them already when they left
One life to fly into another life.
At the same height and with the same speed
Both seem merely at each other's side.
That the crane may share with the cloud
The beautiful sky through which they briefly fly
That neither may linger here longer
And neither see but the swinging
Of the other in the wind which both feel
Now lying next to each other in flight.
If only they not perish and stay with each other
The wind may lead them into nothingness
They can be driven from each place
Where rain threatens and shots ring out
Nothing can touch either of them.
Thus under the sun's and the moon's little varying orbs
They fly on together lost and belonging to each other.
Where to, you? — Nowhere. Away from whom? — From all.
You ask how long are they together?
A short time. And when will they leave each other?
Thus seem the lovers to draw strength from love.

[*Translated from the German by Inge S. Marcuse*]

The image of liberation is in the flight of the cranes, through their beautiful sky, with the clouds which accompany them: sky and clouds belong to them — without mastery and domination. The image is in their ability to flee the spaces where they are threatened: the rain and the rifle shots. They are safe as long as they remain themselves, entirely with each other. The image is a vanishing one: the wind can take them into nothingness — they would still be safe: they fly from one life into another life. Time itself matters no longer:

9. *Gedichte,* vol. II (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1960), p. 210. Erich Kahler and Theodor W. Adorno have revealed the significance of this poem. See Adorno, *Aesthetische Theorie* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 123.

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the cranes met only a short while ago, and they will leave each other soon. Space is no longer a limit: they fly nowhere, and they flee from everyone, from all. The end is illusion: love *seems* to give duration, to conquer time and space, to evade destruction. But the illusion cannot deny the reality which it invokes: the cranes *are,* in their sky, with their clouds. The end is also denial of the illusion, insistence on its reality, realization. This insistence is in the poem's language which is prose becoming verse and song in the midst of the brutality and corruption of the *Netzestadt* (Mahagonny) — in the dialogue between a whore and a bum. There is no word in this poem which is not prose. But these words are joined to sentences, or parts of sentences which say and show what ordinary language never says and shows. The apparent "protocol statements," which seem to describe things and movements in direct perception, turn into images of that which goes beyond all direct perception: the flight into the realm of freedom which is also the realm of beauty.

Strange phenomenon: beauty as a quality which is in an opera of Verdi as well as in a Bob Dylan song, in a painting of Ingres as well as Picasso, in phrase of Flaubert as well as James Joyce, in a gesture of the Duchess of Guermantes as well as of a hippie girl! Common to all of them is the expression, against its plastic deerotization, of beauty as negation of the commodity world and of the performances, attitudes, looks, gestures, required by it.

The aesthetic form will continue to change as the political practice succeeds (or fails) to build a better society. At the optimum, we can envisage a universe common to art and reality, but in this common universe, art would retain its transcendence. In all likelihood, people would not talk or write or compose poetry; *la prose du monde* would persist. The "end of art" is conceivable only if men are no longer capable of distinguishing between true and false, good and evil, beautiful and ugly, present and future. This would be the state of perfect barbarism at the height of civilization — and such a state is indeed a historical possibility.

Art can do nothing to prevent the ascent of barbarism — it cannot by itself keep open its own domain in and against society. For its own preservation and development, art depends on the struggle for the abolition of the social system which generates barbarism as its own potential stage: potential form of its progress. The fate of

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art remains linked to that of the revolution. In this sense, it is indeed an internal exigency of art which drives the artist to the streets — to fight for the Commune, for the Bolshevist revolution, for the German revolution of 1918, for the Chinese and Cuban revolutions, for all revolutions which have the historical chance of liberation. But in doing so he leaves the universe of art and enters the larger universe of which art remains an antagonistic part: that of radical practice.

Today's cultural revolution places anew on the agenda the problems of a Marxist aesthetics. In the preceding sections, I tried to make a tentative contribution to this subject; an adequate discussion would require another book. But one specific question must again be raised in this context, namely, the meaning, and the very possibility, of a "proletarian literature" (or working-class literature). In my view, the discussion has never again reached the theoretical level it attained in the twenties and early thirties, especially in the controversy between Georg Lukács, Johannes R. Becher and Andor Gabor on the one side, and Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Hanns Eisler and Ernst Bloch on the other. The discussion during this period is recorded and reexamined in Helga Gallas' excellent book *Marxistische Literaturtheorie*.[10]

All protagonists accept the central concept according to which art (the discussion is practically confined to literature) is determined, in its "truth content" as well as in its forms, by the class situation of the author (of course not simply in terms of his personal position and consciousness but of the objective correspondence of his work to the material and ideological position of the class). The conclusion which emerges from this discussion is that at the historical stage where the position of the proletariat alone renders possible insight into the totality of the social process, and into the necessity and direction of radical change (i.e., into "the truth"), only a proletarian literature can fulfill the progressive function of art and develop a revolutionary consciousness: indispensable weapon in the class struggle.

Can such a literature arise in the traditional forms of art, or

10. (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1971).

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will it develop new forms and techniques? This is the case of the controversy: while Lukács (and with him the then "official" Communist line) insists on the validity of the (revamped) tradition (especially the great realistic novel of the nineteenth century), Brecht demands radically different forms (such as the "epic theater") and Benjamin calls for the transition from the art form itself to such new technical expressions as the film: "large, closed forms versus small, open forms."

In a sense, the confrontation between closed and open forms seems no longer an adequate expression of the problem: compared with today's antiart, Brecht's open forms appear as "traditional" literature. The problem is rather the underlying concept of a *proletarian world view* which, by virtue of its (particular) class character, represents the truth which art must communicate if it is to be authentic art. This theory

> presupposes the existence of a proletarian world view. But precisely this presupposition does not stand up to an even tentative [*annähernde*] examination.[11]

This is a statement of fact — and a theoretical insight. If the term "proletarian world view" is to mean the world view that is prevalent among the working class, then it is, in the advanced capitalist countries, a world view shared by a large part of the other classes, especially the middle classes. (In ritualized Marxist language, it would be called petty bourgeois reformist consciousness.) If the term is to designate *revolutionary* consciousness (latent or actual), then it is today certainly not distinctively or even predominantly "proletarian" — not only because the revolution against global monopoly capitalism is more and other than a proletarian revolution, but also because its conditions, prospects and goals cannot be adequately formulated in terms of a proletarian revolution. And if this revolution is to be (in whatever form) present as a goal in literature, such literature could not be typically proletarian.

This is at least the conclusion suggested by Marxian theory. I recall again the dialectic of the universal and the particular in the concept of the proletariat: as a class in but not of capitalist society, its particular interest (its own liberation) is at the same time the

11. Ibid., p. 73.

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general interest: it cannot free itself without abolishing itself as a class, and all classes. This is not an "ideal," but the very dynamic of the socialist revolution. It follows that the goals of the proletariat *as revolutionary class* are self-transcendent: while remaining historical concrete goals, they extend, in their class content, beyond the specific class content. And if such transcendence is an essential quality of all art and Trotsky, as well as Lenin, was critical of the notion of a in bourgeois art, and in all forms of art. It seems to be more than a matter of personal preference if Marx had a conservative taste in art and Trotsky, as well as Lenin, was critical of the notion of a "proletarian culture."[12]

It is therefore no paradox, and no exception, when even specifically proletarian contents find their home in "bourgeois literature." They are often accompanied by a kind of linguistic revolution, which replaces the language of the ruling class by that of the proletariat — without exploding the traditional form (of the novel, the drama). Or, conversely, the proletarian revolutionary contents are formed in the "high," stylized language of (traditional) poetry: as in Brecht's *Three Penny Opera* and *Mahagonny* and in the "artistic" prose of his *Galilei.*

The spokesmen for a specifically proletarian literature tried to save this notion by establishing a sweeping criterion that would allow them to reject the "reformist" bourgeois radicals, namely, the appearance, in the work, of the basic laws which govern capitalist society. Lukács himself made this the shibboleth by which to identify authentic revolutionary literature. But precisely this requirement offends the very nature of art. The basic structure and dynamic of society can never find sensuous, aesthetic expression: they are, in Marxian theory, the essence behind the appearance, which can only be attained through scientific analysis, and formulated only in the terms of such an analysis. The "open form" cannot close the gap between the scientific truth and its aesthetic appearance. The introduction, into the play or the novel, of montage, documentation, reportage may well (as in Brecht) become an essential part of the aesthetic form — but it can do so only as a subordinate part.

Art can indeed become a weapon in the class struggle by promoting changes in the prevailing consciousness. However, the cases where

12. Gallas, Ibid., p. 210 f.

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a transparent correlation exists between the respective *class* consciousness and the work of art are extremely rare (Molière, Beaumarchais, Defoe). By virtue of its own subversive quality, art is associated with revolutionary consciousness, but to the degree to which the prevailing consciousness of a class is affirmative, integrated, blunted, revolutionary art will be opposed to it. Where the proletariat is nonrevolutionary, revolutionary literature will *not* be proletarian literature. Nor can it be "anchored" in the prevailing ("nonrevolutionary") consciousness: only the *rupture,* the *leap,* can prevent the resurrection of the "false" consciousness in a socialist society.

The fallacies which surround the notion of a revolutionary literature are still aggravated in today's cultural revolution. The antiintellectualism rampant in the New Left champions the demand for a working-class literature which expresses the worker's actual interests and "emotions." For example:

"Intellectual pundits of the Left" are blamed for their "revolutionary aesthetic," and a "certain coterie of talmudists" is taken to task for being more "expert in weighing the many shadings and nuances of a word than involvement in the revolutionary process."[13] Archaic antiintellectualism abhors the idea that the former may be an essential part of the latter, part of that translation of the world into a new language which may communicate the radically new claims of liberation.

Such spokesmen for the proletarian ideology criticize the cultural revolution as a "middle-class trip." The philistine mind is at its very best when it proclaims that this revolution will "become meaningful" only "when it begins to understand the very real cultural meaning that a washing machine, for instance, has for a working class family with small children in diapers." And the philistine mind demands that "the artists of that revolution . . . tune in on the emotions of that family on the day, after months of debate and planning, that the washing machine is delivered. . . ."[14]

This demand is reactionary not only from an artistic but also from a political point of view. Regressive is, not the emotion of the working-class family, but the idea to make them into a standard for authentic radical and socialist literature: what is proclaimed to

13. Irvin Silber, in *Guardian,* December 13, 1969.
14. Irvin Silver, in *Guardian,* December 6, 1969, p. 17.

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be the focal point of a revolutionary new culture is in fact the adjustment to the established one.

To be sure, the cultural revolution must recognize and subvert this atmosphere of the working-class home, but this will not be done by "tuning in" on the emotions aroused by the delivery of a washing machine. On the contrary, such empathy perpetuates the prevailing "atmosphere."

The concept of proletarian literature = revolutionary literature remains questionable even if it is freed from the "tuning in" on *prevailing* emotions, and, instead, related to the most *advanced* working–class consciousness. This would be a political consciousness, and prevalent only among a minority of the working class. If art and literature would reflect such advanced consciousness, they would have to express the actual conditions of the class struggle and the actual prospects of subverting the capitalist system. But precisely these brutally political contents *militate* against their aesthetic transformation — therefore the very valid objection against "pure art." However, these contents also militate against a less pure translation into art, namely, the translation into the concreteness of the daily life and practice. Lukács has, on these grounds, criticized a representative workers' novel of the time: the personages of this novel talk at the dinner table at home the same language as a delegate at a party meeting.[15]

A revolutionary literature in which the working class is the subject–object, and which is the historical heir, the definite negation, of "bourgeois" literature, remains a thing of the future.

But what holds true for the notion of revolutionary art with respect to the working classes in the advanced capitalist countries does not apply to the situation of the racial minorities in these countries, and the majorities in the Third World. I have already referred to black music; there is also a black literature, especially poetry, which may well be called revolutionary: it lends voice to a total rebellion which finds expression in the aesthetic form. It is not a "class" literature, and its particular content is at the same time the universal one: what is at stake in the specific situation of the oppressed racial minority is the most general of all needs, namely, the very existence of the individual and his group as human beings. The most extreme political *content does not repel traditional forms.*

15. Gallas, *loc. cit.*, p. 121. A Communist participant in the discussion remarked correctly that in this case one should call things by their name and speak not of art or literature but of propaganda.

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James Tate

From ABSENCES

"I'll write a song about nothing at all,
Not about myself, nor about anything else.
Not about love, nor about the joys of youth,
Nor anything else.
I wrote it just now as I slept
In the saddle.
I do not know at which hour I was born;
I am not joyful and yet not sad;
I am neither reserved nor intimate
And can do nothing about it:
I was put under a spell one night
On a high hill."

—Guillaume IX of Aquitaine (1071-1127)

When did you begin your quest?
I'm late now.
Crucial moment before a shave,
the stars are famished.
Pop off my arms,
give them away, no, throw.
Neither possibility
is a possibility:
putrid sludge of veins & arteries.

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I play everything backwards
to see how it will be next time,
such a textbook. All

is suddenly quiet: this legend
has only one knife,
the wind is nothing to me,
it flies in no direction
like a thousand crows,
trips me in my flight of nightness.
Do you want the bones
beneath my eyelid?
I'm late now.

I'm free of that little bit of sunshine.
She has killed me with one cold glance.
I sit back now & wait
for an explosion of larks,
but nothing comes.
Some terrible venom in a stare,
I wish I had one.
Not even hot coals
to carry with me
as I watch the last moth leave.
I existed in the wrong hour of dawn,
that kind of beauty
so no miles from anything.

In a drunken moment years ago
the hero would be me,
effervescent, welcoming a rattled polkadot
of snow, instead of just sitting here
nervously, twisting a casual wink
into this, in a ditch computing
the future, the dust & the whiteness.
I feel a morbid desire for music.
It comes to zero,

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knowing another is near,
a wise man, singing.
Never say drunken angry visionary.
I knit the floating mouth
to the sheep called nobler.

We should all be behind bars.
I am the commuter
no matter how unreachably far away.
Burrowing a tunnel
through the dump,
please erase sleep from this dream.
Not a tear was shed all spring.
The springs grow shorter.
I hold my breath in my hand.
Why do I bother to speak?
Make love to a moose, maybe.
I can imagine a wife
serving dinner
of lightbulbs & garbage-cans.
How do you like your mashed potatoes?
With pins in them.
Pretty soon I am talking
to the secretary
of her personal secretary,
a faithful wife, in herself,

a jaspered morning.

So close I came to you
each moment I was alive:
summer of turnstiles,
unnatural waltzes
with funereal jurors.
In the pink lobby
the abortion got away.
Large soft brown discs.
Now it is quiet in the bar:

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no one says to the other,
"It is all one to me,
sexuality & the trucking industry."
Break open ourselves,
but there are not enough selves
to go around.

The littlest finger on the left hand
on which so much hangs,
sings his silent serenade.
What are you doing?
Where are you going?
The lightning will sting your eyes.
A particular formation of clouds —
I am not referring to my mother,
the gypsy — is learning to speak,
finer cold she should not have to think.
And now they want back their nothing.
But the few I do have
actually I don't have.

The mattress is disembowelled.
When you call her name, Wanda
falls into a deep sleep,
the littlest finger on her left hand
is mugged by lint.

I was confused
then I got used to it
as I got used to whiskers.
The laugh is bitter & forced
flat as a hungover Sunday school teacher
all beat-up by the blight
of the truth of the night before.
There, apologize, for thinking.
A pinched & brittle smile.
Throw a handful of magic
purple dust in my eyes

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so I can see the last straw.
All the time I am afraid
the children from my childhood
will get me, my whistling
hot fantasy: those were great moments
in somebody's life.

I look at the ceiling,
then turn and avert my eyes,
and say exactly what is expected of me:
the days just come to me.
Why aren't you in my way?

Where do the words go
when I have done with them?
My mouth should chase them.

The moon in her white nightgown,
the moon in her nightgown of nonchalance,
the warm drawers of the moon:

I don't know what I'm going to do
but it will include the terror
of earrings, earrings in the backseat,

nylons on the tub.

Thus the galaxy is inhabited
shouting & dancing around
with my ex-girlfriend, the spy.
We had a big fight one night
because she wouldn't wash her hands
of the blood from a coitus
interruptus midnight phonecall.
There never vos sich times.
Then I swiftly pierced my Bible
with an icepick &
slept in a field of general blur.

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Some particularly dear friend
I can't conceive of
that brings your face to mine,

a well to be filled with
tossed pennies, a pair
of green bikini panties
stranded on the doorknob

is my favorite cave.

I have nothing to stop my brother:
as I try to predict his next move
a girl is blowing suds out the window.
There must be millions.
A postcard in the mud
tinkles with transparent scripture.
Sunshine came down
on the weird statues
out-front the hotel
of three worlds: your bag
of tears is all
you have to empty
before you enter.

On the clerk's lapel spells Roxy.

I'll never go that far again.
I'm happy it's over.
What's inside the fiddle in the meadow?
Under the shadow of the hammer
the constant flow
of the great bodysnatcher
through the chattering streets.
Way back there in the avalanche
following some ship-lover
over the horizon

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the mean touchiness of creation
hovers unapproachably

like a permanent wink.

Toto, I don't think we're in Kansas.
The orange glow of an eraced creature
murdered in comfort by mama's ax
flies into the organ.
The voice of the leaf on the neck
poisons the dowry in the yellow kitchen.
Soft Oothoons, afterall, dropped
the woodlouse overboard
with a sailor's smile.
And eleven elves drop dead
in the basin of gold trousers.
Prayers lay like pale beards
on the street. Nearing an island,
I forget to wave. It is too beautiful
to excite me with the idea
of accessibility.

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Peter Brooks

THE MELODRAMATIC IMAGINATION

There is at the start of Balzac's novel *La Peau de chagrin* a passage which suggests how we should read Balzac, how he locates and creates his drama, and, more generally, what the melodramatic imagination is up to. When Raphael de Valentin enters a gambling house to play roulette with his last franc, a shadowy figure crouched behind a counter rises up to ask for the young man's hat. The gesture of surrendering one's hat forthwith elicits a series of questions from the narrator:

> Is this some scriptural and providential parable? Isn't it rather a way of concluding a diabolical contract by exacting from you a sort of security? Or may it be to oblige you to maintain a respectful demeanour toward those who are about to win your money? Is it the police, lurking in the sewers of society, trying to find out your hatter's name, or your own, and if you've inscribed it on the headband? Or is it, finally, to measure your skull in order to compile an instructive statistic on the cranial capacity of gamblers?[1]

The gestures of life call forth a series of interrogations aimed at discovering the meanings implicit in them. The narrative voice is not content to describe and record gesture, to see it simply as a figure in the interplay of people one with another. Rather, the narrator applies pressure to the gesture, pressure through interrogation, through

1. Honoré de Balzac, *La Peau de chagrin,* in *La Comédie Humaine,* ed. Marcel Bouteron (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1964-65), I, 11-12. Subsequent quotations from Balzac are from this edition.

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the evocation of more and more fantastic possibilities, to make it yield meaning, to make it give up to consciousness its full potentialities as "parable."

Throughout these first pages of *La Peau de chagrin,* we can observe the narrator pressuring the surface of reality in order to make it yield the full, true terms of his story. In the face of the old man who takes the hat, says the narrator, we can read "the wretchedness of hospital wards, aimless wanderings of ruined men, inquests on countless suicides, life sentences at hard labor, exiles to penal colonies." The gambling house itself elicits a contrast between the "vulgar poetry" of its evening denizens and the "quivering passion" of daytime gamblers. The crowd of spectators is like the populace awaiting an execution at the Place de Grève. Finally we reach this comment: "Each of the spectators looked for a *drama* in the fate of this single gold piece, perhaps the final scene of a noble life."

Use of the word "drama" is authorized here by the kind of pressure which the narrator has exerted upon surface reality. We have in fact witnessed the creation of drama — of an excessive, hyperbolic, parabolic story — from the banal stuff of reality. States of being beyond the immediate context of the narrative, and in excess of it, have been brought to bear on it, to charge it with intenser significances. The narrative voice, with its grandiose questions and hypotheses, leads us in a movement through and beyond the surface of things to what lies behind, to the spiritual reality which is the true scene of the highly colored drama to be played out in the novel. We have entered into the drama of Raphael's last gold piece; that coin has become the token of a superdrama involving life and death, perdition and redemption, heaven and hell, the force of desire caught in a death struggle with the life force. The novel is constantly tensed to catch this essential drama, to go beyond the surface of the real to the truer, hidden reality, to open up the world of spirit.

One could adduce a multitude of other examples. There is always a moment in Balzac's descriptions of the world where the eye's photographic registration of objects yields to the mind's effort to pierce surface, to interrogate appearances. In *Père Goriot,* after a few initial lines of description of Mlle. Michonneau, the narrator shifts into the interrogatory: "What acid had stripped this creature of her female forms? She must once have been pretty and well-built: was

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it vice, sorrow, greed? Had she loved too much, been a go-between or simply a courtesan? Was she expiating the triumphs of an insolent youth? . ." (II, 855). Reality is both the scene of drama for Balzac, and mask of the true drama, which lies behind, is mysterious, and can only be alluded to, questioned, then gradually elucidated. His drama is *of* the true, wrested from the real; the streets and walls of Paris under pressure of the narrator's insistence become the elements of a Dantesque vision, leading the reader into infernal circles: "as step by step daylight fades and the song of the guide goes hollow when the visitor descends into the Catacombs."

The same process may be observed in Balzac's dramatizations of human encounters: they tend toward intense, excessive representations of life which strip the facade of manners to reveal the essential conflicts at work, moments of symbolic confrontation which fully articulate the terms of the drama. In *Gobseck,* for instance, the sinning Comtesse de Restaud, struggling to preserve her fortune for her two illegitimate children, is caught in the act of trying to wrest her husband's secrets from the oldest son (the legitimate one) when the Count rises from his deathbed:

> "Ah!" cried the Count, who had opened the door and appeared suddenly, almost naked, already as dried and shrivelled as a skeleton . . . "You watered my life with sorrows, and now you would trouble my death, pervert the mind of my son, turn him into a vicious person," he cried in a rasping voice.
>
> The Countess threw herself at the feet of this dying man whom the last emotions of life made almost hideous and poured out her tears.
>
> "Pardon, pardon!" she cried.
>
> "Had you any pity for me?" he asked. "I let you devour your fortune, now you want to devour mine, and ruin my son."
>
> "All right, yes, no pity for me, be inflexible," she said. "But the children! Condemn your wife to live in a convent, I will obey; to expiate my faults toward you I will do all you command; but let the children live happily! Oh, the children, the children!"
>
> "I have only one child," answered the Count stretching in a gesture of despair his shrivelled arm toward his son. [II, 665]

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I have deliberately chosen an extreme example here, and in quoting it out of its context, I run the risk of confirming the view, popularized by Martin Turnell and others, that Balzac is a popular melodramatist whose versions of life are cheap, overwrought and hollow. Balzac's use of hyperbolic figures, of lurid and grandiose events, masked relationships and disguised identities, abductions, slow-acting poisons, secret societies, mysterious parentage and other elements from the melodramatic repertory; and even more, his forcing of narrative voice to the breathless pitch of melodrama, his insistence that life be always seen through highly colored lenses, have of course always been the object of critical attack. "His melodrama," Turnell comments in *The Novel in France,* "reminds us not so much of Simenon or even Mrs. Christie as of the daily serial in the BBC's Light Programme." In his most waspish *Scrutiny* manner, he adds: "it must be confessed that our experience in reading Balzac is not always very elevated and that his interests are by no means always those of the adult.

To the extent that the "interests of the adult" imply repression, sacrifice of the pleasure principle and a refusal to live beyond the quotidian, Turnell is right, but his rightness misses the point of Balzac's drive to push *through* manners to deeper sources of being. Such representations as the scene I quoted from *Gobseck* are necessary culminations to the kind of drama Balzac is trying to evoke. The progress of the narrative elicits and authorizes such terminal articulations. The scene represents a victory over repression, a climactic moment at which the characters are able to confront one another with full expressivity, to fix in large gestures the meaning of their existences. As in the interrogations of *La Peau de chagrin* we saw a desire to push through surfaces to a "drama" in the realm of emotional and spiritual reality, so in the scene from *Gobseck* we find a desire to make articulate all that this family tragedy has come to be about.

This desire to express all seems a primary characteristic of the melodramatic mode. Nothing is spared because nothing is left unsaid; the characters stand on stage and utter the unspeakable, give voice to their deepest feelings, dramatize through their heightened and polarized words and gestures the whole lesson of their relationship. Life tends, in this fiction, toward ever more concentrated and totally expressive gestures and statements. Raphael de Valentin is given a

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lesson by the old antiques dealer, "Desire sets us afire and power destroys us" — terms which reveal the true locus and the stakes of his drama. Eugène de Rastignac, in *Père Goriot,* is summoned to Vionnet give up "all attempt at a manner," and break down in tears. This stark articulation, which clarifies and simplifies Mme. de Vionnet's position and passion, puts her in touch with elemental humanity — "as a maidservant crying for her young man," thinks Strether — and with the ravages of time, finally differs very little from the exchanges of the Count and Countess Restaud in the passage I quoted from *Gobseck.* The Jamesian mode is subtler, more refined, but it aims at the same thing: a total articulation of the grandiose moral terms of the drama, an assertion that what is being played out within the realm of manners is charged with significance from the realm of the moral occult, that gestures within the world constantly refer us to another, hyperbolic, parabolic set of gestures where life and death are at stake.

There is a passage from James's 1902 essay on Balzac (he wrote five in all) which touches closely on the problem of melodramatic representation. A notable point about the passage is that it constitutes a reparation, for in his 1875 essay, in *French Poets and Novelists,* choose between Obedience, represented by the family, and Revolt, represented by the outlaw Vautrin. The metaphoric texture of the prose itself suggests polarization into moral absolutes: Rastignac's "last tear of youth," shed over Goriot's grave, from the earth where it falls "rebounds up to heaven." The world is subsumed by an underlying manichaeism, and the narrative creates the excitement of its drama by putting us in touch with the conflict of good and evil played out under the surface of things — just as description of the surfaces of the modern metropolis pierces through to a mythological realm where the imagination can find a habitat for its play with large moral entities. If we consider the prevalence of hidden relationships and masked personages and occult powers in Balzac, we find that they derive from a sense that the novelist's true subject is hidden and masked — because the center of his interest and the scene of his drama is in fact what we might call the "moral occult," the domain of operative spiritual values which is both indicated within and masked by the surface of reality. The moral occult is not a metaphysical system; it is closer to unconscious mind: a sphere of being where our most basic desires and interdictions lie, a realm which

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in quotidian existence may appear closer off from us, but which we can get in touch with, must get in touch with since it is the realm of meaning and value. The melodramatic mode exists to locate and to articulate the moral occult.

I shall come back to these formulations. I want first to try to extend our understanding of the melodrama of manners, and the kinds of representations of social life that it gives. And I want to extend the argument beyond Balzac by calling upon his greatest admirer among subsequent novelists, Henry James. The melodramatic tenor of James's imagination was beautifully caught by his secretary, Theodora Bosanquet, when she wrote:

> When he walked out of the refuge of his study into the world and looked about him, he saw a place of torment, where creatures of prey perpetually thrust their claws into the quivering flesh of the doomed, defenceless children of light. [*Henry James at Work*][1]

James's moral manichaeism is the basis of a vision in which the social world is made the scene of dramatic choice between heightened moral alternatives, where every gesture, no matter how frivolous or insignificant it may seem, is charged with the conflict between light and darkness, salvation and damnation — where people's destinies and choices of life seem finally to have little to do with practical realities of a situation, and much more to do with an intense drama in which consciousness must purge itself and assume the burden of moral sainthood. The theme of renunciation which sounds through James's novels — Isabel Archer's return to Gilbert Osmond, Strether's return to Woollett, Densher's rejection of Kate Croy — is incomprehensible and unjustifiable except as a victory within the realm of a moral occult which may be so inward and personal that it appears restricted to the individual consciousness, predicated on the individual's "sacrifice to the ideal."

As Jacques Barzun has emphasized in his essay in "Henry James Melodramatist," James always creates a high degree of excitement from his dramatized moral dilemmas, partly because of his preoccupation with evil as a positive force ever menacing violent conflict

1. Leo B. Levy also quotes this in his *Versions of Melodrama*.

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and outburst. Balzac did an apprenticeship in the *roman noir,* nourished himself from Gothic novel and frenetic adventure story and invented cops-and-robbers fiction. These are modes which insist that reality can be exciting, can be equal to the demands of the imagination, its play with large moral conflicts. With James, the same insistence has been further transposed into the drama of moral consciousness, so that excitement derives from characters' own dramatized apprehension of clashing moral forces. A famous sentence from the Preface to *Portrait of a Lady* suggests James's intent. He is describing Isabel's vigil of discovery, the night she sits up and makes her mind move from discovery to discovery about Gilbert Osmond. "It is," says James, "a representation simply of her motionless *seeing,* and an attempt withal to make the mere still lucidity of her act as 'interesting' as the surprise of a caravan or the identification of a pirate." The terms of reference in the adventure story are mocked; yet they remain the terms of reference: moral consciousness must be an adventure, its recognitions must be the stuff of a heightened drama.

The excitement and violence of the melodrama of consciousness are obviously and derivatively Balzacian in *The American.* Newman's initiation into the epistemology of good and evil is represented as a dark ancestral crime hidden beneath — and suggested by — the gilded surface of Faubourg Saint-Germain society: depths open beneath the well-guarded social image of the Bellegarde family; crisis is revelation of sin, and Newman's consciousness must expand to receive the lurid, flashing lights of melodrama. But even in James's latest and most subtle fiction — probably most of all in this fiction — the excitement of plot is generated exclusively from conflict within the realm of the moral occult. There is a pressure similar to Balzac's on the surface of things, to make reality yield the terms of the drama of this moral occult. To take deliberately a fairly low-keyed example, from *The Ambassadors:* following the revelation of Mme. de Vionnet's relationship with Chad, Strether goes to pay her a final visit. He stands for the last time in her apartment:

> From beyond this, and as from a great distance — beyond the court, beyond the corps de logis forming the front — came, as if excited and exciting, the vague voice of Paris. Strether had all along been subject to sudden gusts of fancy in connexion with such

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> matters as these — odd starts of the historic sense, suppositions and divinations with no warrant but their intensity. Thus and so, on the eve of the great recorded dates, the days and nights of revolution, the sounds had come in, the omens, the beginnings broken out. They were the smell of revolution, the smell of the public temper — or perhaps simply the smell of blood.

That this vision is ascribed to Strether's "gusts of fancy" does not really hedge the bet. James makes the "unwarranted" vision exist, wrests forth from "beyond" the facades of Paris sinister implications of impending disaster, chaos, and pervades the final encounter of Strether and Mme. de Vionnet with "the smell of blood." Their relation has all along been based on Strether's "exorbitant" commitment to "save her" if he could. Here, the evocation of bloody sacrifice, eliciting a state of moral exorbitance, authorizes the intensity of the encounter, where Strether sees Mme. de Vionnet as resembling Mme. Roland on the scaffold, and where he moves to his most penetrating vision of the realm of moral forces in which she struggles. "With this sharpest perception yet, it was like a chill in the air to him, it was almost appalling, that a creature so fine could be, by mysterious forces, a creature so exploited." Strether, and James, have pierced through to a medium in which Mme. de Vionnet can be seen as a child of light caught in the claws of the mysterious birds of prey. After this perception, when Strether speaks it is to say, "You're afraid for your life!" — an articulation which strikes home, makes Mme. de James had singled out the episode in *Illusions perdues* where Mme. de Bargeton, under the influence of her Parisian relation the Marquise d'Espard, drops her provincial young lover Lucien de Rubempré, as an example of Balzac's inteptitude in portrayal of the aristocracy. The two women desert Lucien, whose dress is ridiculous and whose plebeian parentage has become public knowledge, in the middle of the opera, and sneak out the loge. Aristocratic ladies would not so lose their cool, James argues in the earlier essay, would not behave in so flustered and overly dramatic a fashion. His view in 1902 is more nuanced, and shows an attempt to come to terms with the mode of representation we find in Balzac:

> The whole episode, in "Les Illusions perdues," of Madame de Bargeton's "chucking" Lucien de Rubempré, under pressure of Madame d'Espard's shockability as to his coat and trousers and

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> other such matters, is either a magnificent lurid document or the baseless fabric of a vision. The great wonder is that, as I rejoice to put it, we can never really discover which, and that we feel as we read that we can't, and that we suffer at the hands of no other author this particular helplessness of immersion. It is *done* — we are always thrown back on that; we can't get out of it; all we can do is to say that the true itself can't be more than done and that if the false in this way equals it we must give up looking for the difference. Alone among novelists Balzac has the secret of an insistence that somehow makes the difference nought. He warms his facts into life — as witness the certainty that the episode I just cited has absolutely as much of that property as if perfect matching had been achieved. If the great ladies in question *didn't* behave, wouldn't, couldn't have behaved, like a pair of nervous snobs, why so much the worse, we say to ourselves, for the great ladies in question. We *know* them so — they owe their being to our so seeing them; whereas we can never tell ourselves how we should otherwise have known them or what quantity of being they would on a different footing have put forth. ["Balzac," in *Notes on Novelists*]

James's somewhat baffled admiration here seems to arise from a perception of "surreality" in Balzac's representation of the episode: the fact that its hyperbolic mode and intensity make it figure more perfectly than would an accurate portrayal of manners what is really at stake for the characters, and in their relationships. If reality does not permit of such self-representations, he seems to say, then so much the worse for reality. By the doing of the thing, we know the characters; we are, if not in the domain of reality, in that of truth.

James poses the alternative of judging Balzac's episode to be "either a magnificent lurid document or the baseless fabric of a vision," to conclude that we cannot tell which it is. This alternative, and the admission of defeat in the attempt to choose, strikes close to the center of the problem of melodrama. I would suggest that the melodramatic imagination writes magnificent lurid documents which are founded on the void, which depend for their validity on a kind of visionary leap. When Balzac pressures the details of reality, at the start of *La Peau de chagrin,* to make them yield the terms of his drama, when he insists that gestures refer to a parabolic story; or when he creates a hyperbolic version of Lucien de Rubempre's social

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defeat, he is using the things and gestures of the real world, of social life as kinds of metaphors which refer us to the realm of spiritual reality, the realm of latent moral meanings. Things cease to be merely themselves, gestures cease to be merely tokens of social intercourse whose meaning is assigned by a social code; they become the vehicles of metaphors whose tenor suggests another kind of reality, which is the true object of attention. Likewise, discovery of Mme. de Vionnet's affair with Chad is essentially a vehicle for discovery of her entrapment and exploitation by "mysterious forces," her victimization by life. I. A. Richards has given a global definition of metaphor as a "transaction between contexts," and in all these cases there is such a transaction: pressure on the primary context is such that things and gestures are made to release hidden meanings, to transfer their signification to another context.

Both Balzac and James weave a rich texture of metaphor in their prose, and the metaphors almost always create an expanded moral context for the narrative. But it is not a question of metaphoric texture alone; it is rather that to the melodramatic imagination, things are necessarily all in the nature of metaphor because things are not simply themselves, but refer to, speak of something else. If we consider in this light the implications of works like *The Beast in the Jungle* and *The Sacred Fount,* we find that the more elusive the tenor of the metaphor becomes — the more difficult it becomes to put one's finger on the nature of the spiritual reality alluded to — the more highly charged is the vehicle, the more strained with pressure to suggest a meaning beyond. Melodrama may be a drama which is heightened, hyperbolic *because* the moral realm it wants to evoke is not immediately visible, and the writer is ever conscious of standing over a void, dealing in conflicts, qualities and quantities whose very existence is uncertain. The violence and extremism of emotion and moral statement we find in melodrama may then derive from the fact that they are unjustified, unfounded emotion and ethical consciousness, qualities that cannot be shown to bear any imperative relationship to the way life is lived by most people. To the uncertainty of the tenor corresponds the exaggeration, the heightening of the vehicle. To come at the question in other terms: a definition of melodrama might be analogous to T. S. Eliot's definition of "sentimentality" in his essay on *Hamlet.* Sentimentality he calls emotion

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in excess of the objective correlative which ought to embody emotion — that is to say, unfounded emotion.

But melodrama in Balzac and James seems to me less to indicate a failure to adequate objective correlative to emotion as the impossibility of doing so; it suggests a Promethean attempt to reach beyond the visible conditions of man's quotidian drama to its occult issues. My argument here has analogies with that of James Guetti in *The Limits of Metaphor*. He maintains that the work of Melville, Conrad and Faulkner shows ever more audacious and desperate attempts to understand and speak of a central "darkness" which is finally unexpressible, which can finally only be alluded to, can never become the center or object of the narrative that it claims to be. It is, like Marlow's discovery in the heart of darkness, "unspeakable," and the whole narrative is a metaphor whose tenor is ineffable, a tenuous "as if" construction which can never say its meaning and its goal. *The Beast in the Jungle* is a perfectly parallel case, because the beast lying in wait for Marcher is finally nothing, nothingness, the void of his life, the very absence of event — yet this absence is of course charged with terrible and unspeakable meaning by the life lived in its terms, lived in order to reach it. I suppose that *The Sacred Fount* would be the ultimate development of a fiction in which the "lurid document" has become completely indistinguishable from the "baseless fabric of a vision": the narrator's image of the world may be either, and he cannot himself be sure which. All we can say is that the lurid document, the highly colored reportage of his perceptions, seems to be a function of the baselessness of the vision: the more the melodramatic imagination soars in flight, the more highly it charges the documentary terms, the vehicles which must carry its message. And if *The Sacred Fount* probably fails ultimately, it is because the vehicle has been overcharged, and can't bear the weight.

I'm conscious that I have until now been using the word "melodrama" without any attempt to justify it or define it historically. I think that we all receive pretty much the same connotations from the word: extravagant expression, moral polarization, emotional hyperbole, extreme states of being. But it may be useful to dwell for a moment on the historical aesthetics of melodrama, which show in clear skeletal form many of the elements I have been discussing in Balzac's and James's fictional dramatizations, and can help to eluci-

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date the tropes that they employ, the metaphorical nature of their enterprise and particularly the way in which they use the gestures of social reality to imply states of moral being.

Melodrama, most would agree, represents a degenerate form of the tragic — a form of the tragic, we might say, for a world in which there is no longer a tenable idea of the sacred. It is also a popular form of the tragic, exploiting similar emotions within the context of the ordinary. If we return to someone like Guilbert de Pixerecourt, who reigned as king of Parisian melodrama for some thirty years at the start of the nineteenth century, we find a spectacular theater exploiting extreme emotional states of being, which are often represented by extreme physical states: most plays will have a blind man, a mute or someone dramatically mutilated. (How often do Balzac and James create invalids, and make illness a point of view?) Characters tend to express these extreme states in a language of polarized moral abstractions; they *say* their emotional condition, and the drama is a clear clash of the claims of goodness against the claims of badness. If the world at the start of a melodrama seems charged with moral ambiguities — suggested by such titles as *The Woman with Two Husbands* or *The Man with Three Faces* — these ambiguities are not inherent to ethics. They are rather appearances to be penetrated, mysteries to be cleared up, so that the world may bathe in the stark moral lighting of manichaeism — the final fixity of the Count and Countess Restaud, of Gilbert Osmond, of Kate Croy condemned to the solitude of her egotism. Ambiguities are cleared up by total expression: first of the characters to the audience, then of characters to one another. As much as in Greek tragedy, the audience must know where truth and justice lie. But the catharsis sought by melodrama comes less from pity and terror than from the total articulation and vigorous acting out of the emotions: the last act contains chases, duels, struggles which bring the physical release of violence and clear statements of the victory of light over darkness. The hidden identities, mysteries, evils of melodrama are never the result of chance or fate, but of conscious plotting: evil is concerted, volitional — which is not to say that it is motivated. Indeed, the more it is unmotivated the more it becomes a pure product of will, demonstrating that the world is inhabited by a Satanism as real as it is gratuitous.

There further seems to me to be an underlying aesthetic principle in stage melodrama which is even more pertinent to the fic-

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tional melodrama I have been discussing, and which is bound up with the very origin of the idea of melodrama. Melodrama of course originally meant drama accompanied by music, and this use of music seems to have begun in popular eighteenth-century pantomime and a bastard form known as "pantomime dialoguée." The aesthetics of pantomime, and a prediction of its centrality to modern theater, are first developed in Diderot's seminal text, the *Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel,* where he justifies his "bourgeois drama." Diderot makes a major element of his new theater the use of *tableaux,* groupings of persons on the stage and the gestures of these persons, which will be expressive of the interrelationships and emotions of characters as they respond to an event. He describes the family tableau that should be formed with announcement of the son's death: like his favorite painter, Greuze, he is striving to catch in people's postures their qualities of being at a moment of maximal emotionalism. This announces a major break with French neoclassical canons, by which the serious theater was an absolutely verbal medium, a clash of words where action and gesture were extremely restrained and formalized. Gesture becomes of primary importance, since it can express more than words; it can represent the unsayable.

This new valorization of gesture seems to me important to an understanding of the melodramatic mode. What it implies is the total legibility of gesture *as* expression. To clarify this point, let me quote the stage directions for a bit of pantomime from *Le Chef Ecossais* — "The Scottish Chief" — by J. G. A. Cuvelier, another popular melodramatist. On stage is the Chief, his son and a band of followers:

> The band smiles at him, and indicates approval. Then, taking on a character of severity, he tells them that more important subjects should occupy them; he shows them the clouds gathered far off on the mountain slopes in bizarre shapes; he tells them of the glory of Fingal and Ossian, whose images he perceives in their airy palaces; thus he raises the thoughts of young Linni to the Godhead. The child crosses his arms, bows and worships.

Now all of this is to be got across without words, through facial expression and gesture alone. This means that gesture must convey enormous amounts of signification. Gesture itself must be exaggerated, hyperbolic, irreal, charged with meaning beyond itself. And if

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gesture can be so meaning-full, its transcription, its writing down, becomes the process of revealing the latent meaning of everything, the sense of all the *animae* inhabiting a world totally invested with meaning. The totally significant and legible gestures of pantomime constitute a step toward a novelistic enterprise where transcribed gesture, the world described, will be totally significant and legible, and totally expressive of emotional and moral conditions.

Gesture has this same intense charge of meaning in Balzac and James because of its metaphorical ambitions. Its meaning comes, not from its place within a code of gestures which assigns meaning (which is the case in most eighteenth-century comedy of manners, or in Jane Austen, for example), but from its claim to express moral and emotional qualities beyond itself. The dandy De Marsay, refusing to recognize Lucien de Rubempré, lets his lorgnon fall "so singularly that it seemed to Lucien the blade of the guillotine" (IV, 624). In the tale *Facino Cane,* the old blind musician replies to the narrator with "a frightening gesture of extinguished patriotism and disgust for things human" (VI, 71) — an extreme example, because the gesture is so overcharged with meaning, meaning in excess of its vehicle, that the literal gesture is itself virtually obliterated by the meanings it implies. Another example would be Mme. de Mortsauf's "forced smile" on her deathbed, in *Le Lys dans la vallée,* in which the narrator reads "the irony of vengeance, the anticipation of pleasure, the intoxication of the soul and the rage of disappointment" (VIII, 1003). Such a gesture is overdetermined, it produces not only meaning but super-signification. It suggests a world of such electrically charged interconnections and correspondences that everything is inhabited by meaning. With James, we may be tempted to think that gesture receives its charge from its social context; this is after all a classic view of James, but it really does not stand up to scrutiny. The social signification is only the starting point for the immense implications of Jamesian gesture. Take the moment in *The Wings of the Dove* when Densher is told by Milly Theale's gondolier, Eugenio, that Milly can't receive him — his, and our, first indication that a crisis, the crisis, has arrived. Eugenio

> now, as usual, slightly smiled at him in the process — but ever so slightly, this time, his manner also being attuned, our young man made out, to the thing, whatever it was, that constituted the rupture of peace.

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> This manner, while they stood for a long minute facing each other over all they didn't say, played a part as well in the sudden jar to Densher's protected state. It was a Venice all of evil that had broken out for them alike, so that they were together in their anxiety, if they really could have met on it; a Venice of cold, lashing rain from a low black sky, of wicked wind raging through narrow passes, of general arrest and interruption, with the people engaged in all the water-life huddled, stranded and ageless, bored and cynical, under archways and bridges.

The Jamesian prestidigitation is in full glorious evidence here. Eugenio's slight, *too* slight smile is the detailed gesture which indicates a larger manner which in turn indicates a "rupture of peace" — already the vocabulary is taking on strong coloration — and this rupture then becomes the passageway for a flood of evil, conjuring into existence a new Venice of storm, darkness and suppressed violence.

Reflecting on this metaphorical usage in which gestures express qualities beyond themselves, we may be struck by the seeming paradox that the total expressivity assigned to gesture is in fact posited on the ineffability of what is to be expressed. Gesture is read as containing such meanings because it posits their existence, since it works as a metaphorical approach to what cannot be said. If we are often perilously close, in reading these novelists, to a feeling that the represented world won't bear the weight of the significances placed on it, this is because the represented world is almost always being used metaphorically, as sign of the occult moral world. The way the world is represented becomes the very process by which the moral occult is brought into existence, postulated as a true fact, the most important fact of human existence.

The melodramatic imagination is, then, perhaps a way of perceiving and imaging the spiritual in a world where there is no longer any clear idea of the sacred, no generally accepted societal moral imperatives, where the body of the ethical has become a sort of *deus absconditus* which must be sought for, posited, brought into man's existence through exercise of the spiritualist imagination. Balzac's and James's melodrama, and the development of the melodramatic mode from, say, Samuel Richardson to Norman Mailer, is perhaps first of all a desperate effort to renew contact with the sacred *through* the representation of fallen reality, to insist that behind reality, hidden by it yet indicated within it, there is a realm where large moral

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forces are operative, where large choices of ways of being must be made. I have called this realm the moral occult: it is occult in a world where there is no clear system of sacred myth, no unity of belief, no accepted metaphorical chain leading from the phenomenal to the spiritual, only a fragmented society and fragments of myths. Yet the most Promethean of modern writers insist that this realm does exist, and write their fictions to make it exist, to show its primacy in life.

We can conceive of the melodramatic imagination as coming into being during the later eighteenth century, with the final liquidation of a world and a society theoretically organized around sacred myth and sacred history, and the decadence of those literary forms — neoclassical tragedy and comedy of manners — which image a spiritually and socially unified community. That is, the melodramatic mode arises in an era which demands rediscovery of the spiritual within and behind a phenomenal realm which seems to have been deprived of possibilities for transcendence. Stage melodrama is one early response to this demand, the Gothic novel is another. With its exploration of mystery, horror, terror; its graveyards and catacombs, putrid corpses and bloody ghosts, the Gothic novel, as Lowry Nelson has argued in "Night Thoughts on the Gothic Novel," suggests a reassertion of the sacred in its most primitive form, as forces in the phenomenal world that must be propitiated, and to be propitiated must be recognized. In his study entitled *The Gothic Flame,* D. P. Varma calls the Gothic enterprise a "quest for the numinous." This seems to me accurate: books like *The Monk* and *Frankenstein* insist that life cannot be accounted for in terms of social manners and interpersonal conflict alone, that every step man takes on earth calls spirits from the vasty deep, which he must then reckon with. These spirits may of course be read as dwelling within man himself, in areas which the daylight and the social realm takes insufficient account of. The Gothic castle itself, with the pinnacles and dungeons, crenellations, moats, drawbridges, spiraling staircases and concealed doors, can be read as a first draft of the Freudian model of the mind, the structure of consciousness and the unconscious, and their treacherous relationship. The numinous of the Gothic imagination is at one stage the unconscious, and this reading can, as I suggested earlier, be extended to Balzac and James as well: the melodramatic mode of

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utterance is a victory over the repression and censorship of the social reality principle, a release of psychic energy by the articulation of the unsayable. One might say that the Gothic quest for renewed contact with the numinous, the supernatural, the occult forces of the universe, leads into the moral self.

The melodramatic imagination, I would argue, provides the very basis of the modern mind's conception of spiritual reality and moral conflict. We should recognize this mode as a central fact of the modern sensibility in that modern art — and I take Romanticism to be the genesis of the modern, of the sensibility within which we are still living — has typically felt itself to be constructed on, and over, the void, postulating meanings and symbolic systems which have no certain justification because they are backed by no religious hermeneutic and no universally accepted social code. The mad quest of Mallarmé for a Book which would be "the Orphic explanation of the earth," of Yeats for a synthetic mythology which would enable him to hold "in a single thought reality and justice," of Norman Mailer for dreams adequate to the moon — these are all versions of a reaction to the vertiginous feeling of standing over the abyss created when the necessary center of things has been evacuated and dispersed. The search to bring into the drama of man's quotidian existence the higher drama of moral forces seems to me one of the large quests of the modern imagination, and I think that the melodramatic mode as I have described it is an intensified, exemplary version of what most art, since the beginnings of Romanticism, has been about.

What seems to me particularly important in the enterprise of the social melodramatists — and here one should of course include many names beyond Balzac and James — is their dual engagement with the representation of man's social existence, the way he lives his life, and with the moral drama implicated by and in his existence. They write a melodrama *of* manners. On the one hand, they refuse any metaphysical reduction of real life, and refuse to reduce their metaphorical enterprise to the cold symbolism of allegory. They recognize, with Isabel Archer during her intense vigil, that "this base, ignoble world, it appeared, was after all what one was to live for." On the other hand, they insist that life does contain, dissimulated but present within reality, a moral occult which is the realm of eventual value, and this insistence finally makes them more nourishing than

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more "behavioristic" novelists who, from Flaubert onwards, have suggested that there are not more things on earth than can be represented exclusively in terms of the material world. The melodramatists refuse to allow that the world has been drained of transcendence; and they locate that transcendence in the struggle of the children of light with the children of darkness, in the play of ethical mind.

It comes down, finally, to that alternative between the "magnificent lurid document" and the "baseless fabric of a vision" which James posed about Balzac. To make the fabric of vision into a document, to make the document lurid enough so that it releases the vision, to make vision document and document vision and to persuade us that they cannot be distinguished, that they are necessarily interconnected through the chain of spiritual metaphor, that resonances are set up, electrical connections established whenever we touch any link of the chain, is to make the world we inhabit one charged with meaning, one in which interpersonal relations are not merely contacts of the flesh, but encounters that must be carefully nurtured, judged, handled as if they mattered. It is a question, finally, of that attention to the significant in life that James captured in a famous line of advice to young novelists: "Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost." To be so sensitized an instrument, one upon whom everything leaves a mark, with whom everything sets up a correspondence, is not simply to be an observer of life's surface, but someone who must bring into evidence, even bring into being, its moral substance. So that the task of the writer is like that assigned by Balzac to the exiled Dante in his tale, *The Proscribed* (X, 344): "he closed himself in his room, lit his lamp of inspiration, and surrendered himself to the terrible demon of work, calling forth words from silence, and ideas from the night."

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STORIES

Maria Lehmann

CONFESSIONS OF A YOUTH WITHOUT TALENT

I know whose hands will run the toothcomb through this. All right: I'm a fraud, an impostor, a traitor — if you insist. And you, gentlemen, what are you?

O.K. When Zerin was arrested and disappeared it was me, Mole, who got the vacant bungalow in the Writers' Village. That, I suppose, was my reward for writing clever articles in the *Writers' Journal* on "Abstractionism," "Cosmopolitanism" and sins like that, or, more likely, for being "in" with Push and Catar, the *Journal*'s two guiding spirits.

So I moved from the corner behind the sagging curtain I had occupied ever since my sister had to put me up (Mole, the war-orphan!) where I had written secret poems that made me go on living, and had crawled under the bedclothes not to have to listen to my sister and her one-legged war-hero husband "doing it." This brother-in-law of mine, by the way, sits at home all day, every day, making toys from wood I'm positive he's nicked somewhere and, in the process, produces every conceivable noise with every organ he's got left, not excluding some resounding farts, while I, his captive audience behind the curtain, lie, half-suffocated, under the featherbed, trying to write propositions on the role of the poet in a socialist society! Whereas "Zerin's bungalow" had a door and a window I could open and shut when I wanted and a desk with a lamp that shone on my hand while I sat writing. Even now, thinking back on it, I feel a little tremor of exultation. For so little, for so much, will a man sell himself: a lamp, a desk, a window. (As if you bastards didn't know!)

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I'd come across this Zerin only once (you might as well believe this, anyhow, you can't prove the contrary) when, at a meeting of the Writers' Union, he made an exhibition of himself, voting against a motion everybody else had voted for. I remember the indignation, rising like steam. The motion was (you can check up on this): "The Intolerable Must Not Be Tolerated." So this Zerin squeaks in an artificial high voice and flaps his arms as if he were a cock or something. How come, I remember asking myself, nobody goes up to that jerk and shakes him up a bit, the way you shake an old fur over the fire to make the fleas jump? As far as I knew, all he had to his credit were a few poems (the usual robust, optimistic stuff) included in anthologies, out of print these last thirty years and as untraceable as their editors. (Chaps with names like Livshitz or Slootski!) Anyway, even without the crowing, he was a lugubrious-looking sort of fellow, unshaven, sallow, hollow cheeks, the lot. He probably knew by then what was coming to him — we're all very good at that. Aren't we?

His things had of course all gone by the time I moved into his place but, rooting round the secondhand bookshop in the village, I got hold of some dictionaries, glossaries, etc. (he must have made his living from translations, always the last stop), each with the fly-leaf cut at the identical spot and with the identical blunt scissors. Maybe it was the handsome hard covers that made me buy the lot. (It really won't do imputing to me, posthumously, so to speak, sinister motives at that stage.) Anyway, "Zerin's bungalow" was made to look a little less abandoned, a little less basic. But I was soon to regret the whole business. I was sitting at my desk, smirking at the weekly cleaner like a pasha — please remember, nobody, particularly no female, had ever done anything for this poor orphan — when I caught her giving Zerin's books a certain look. Of course! That woman had done the cleaning after the Secret Police. So, the books would have to go. I knew even then that being linked, however tenuously, with that crackpot Zerin, who, according to semiofficial rumors, had just expired in the appropriate loonybin, would mean trouble. And what had possessed me to think of that waddling, interfering cleaning-woman as an unpaid wet nurse? Clearly, I was beginning to slip.

Even the most saintly idiot in our country knows: one can't muck about with the Secret Police. "The truth tickles everybody's

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nostrils," says Babel's old Cossack. Yeah, but supposing some people don't wait for the tickling? Like our boys, who can smell yesterday's fart in tomorrow's wind (or the other way round) and rather do the tickling themselves. Anyway, only a babe-in-arms would try to hide anything whatsoever in the hollow back of a hard-cover book. Well, Zerin seems to have been just such a babe for as I was pulling his dictionaries etc., off the shelf, prior to losing them in some unobserved dustbin, one slipped, hit me on the head and shed something, a tight little roll that, fumbled open, uncurled into flimsy little sheets, covered with tiny, almost illegible, writing. (Our Boys, no doubt considering Zerin a very fiend of cleverness, can never have looked there.)

Whereupon I ran to the door to bolt it and to the window to draw the curtain. And read, by the light of "my" lamp what Zerin, in his childlike way, had treacherously committed to eternity.

It took hours to decipher and even before I'd finished I found myself grizzling like an infant. I'm not exactly the crying kind, well, anyway, not since the boys, shouting "Mole," had shoved handfuls of sand into my mouth and made me swallow. But that night I cried — and it wasn't only for Zerin.

I would pass these poems off as my own. Since — though it had cost me plenty of tears to see it — my own "secret" poems were nothing but childish, inferior muck and not worth living for. Zerin's were. Worth dying for, too — if it came to it.

Well, anyway, that's what I thought then. So, in the locked, bolted, darkened room, I sat and copied — every line of Zerin's sixty or so poems, sweating with fear I might overlook as much, as little, as a comma. Then, at the witching hour, I flushed Zerin's poems down the lavatory. (Oh yes, if it weren't for the untrammeled access to those holes in the canalization system, life as we know it would come to a stop.)

Next I set to "correcting" the copies, scribbling words in the margin and in between lines, any words I could think of in my jittery haste, all the time giggling at my own barbaric inventiveness. Those words were of course crossed out again, not too meticulously, the point of the whole procedure being to suggest an author pruning his way through mountains of "foam" towards perfection. And, Lord, there was perfection here!

I know, none of this is going to be believed. Most likely, you

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chaps prefer a counterrevolutionary genius to a small-time cheat. Fair enough. But this was the way I fabricated my dream, the dream of poor Mole without talent (except the one for formulating, nay, anticipating, the eternal truths of the day). At last, Mole was going to be admired, adored, and provide the supreme justification for the regime: that of genius!

I foresaw no difficulties about getting Zerin's poems published. What, someone like me, thick with Push and Catar (and, let me add, those on top of Push and Catar!), could get the multiplication table published.

Push, blubber-faced oaf, who has to wear his shirt open at the neck because he can't find a collar big enough to fit (I dare say, he'll be thinner now!), took the sheets I handed him, not omitting not to say "Thank you" (had he forgotten himself so far as to say "Thank you," I'd have grown suspicious), then, noticing my efforts were in verse, called out in his eunuch's voice: "Ha, Catar, have a look at this! Our Mole's taken to writing poetry. Well, anyway, one poem. The poor fellow must be in love." So Catar, a specimen I prefer not to look at because of the crinkly tufts of black hair that sprout in his nostrils (ears as well), came in, giving me the obligatory nail-scissors look (crooked but sharp) and he and Push "have a look," taking their time about it. Just as well, otherwise those two foxes would have grown suspicious of the rather clammy state I was in. Green in crime, I still thought it possible people like Push and Catar might have read something by Zerin and spot the identification mark — to talk the appropriate police jargon. Just shows what a fool I was. Even so, when those two did turn round, though they complimented me somewhat ambiguously, they looked like two tailors, used to working for midgets, who, through no fault of their own, find themselves with a six-footer for a customer and don't like it.

Catar, the brain, deployed another of his rapier looks as if to limn my silhouette forever on the wall behind. "Not bad, that poem. In fact, quite good." Pushing his mouth up in a U-shape smile so that the hair in the nostrils had to bristle outwards. And Push assured me graciously that "the thing" would be published — "although, and because, it is a little unusual — and Catar agrees with me there." (In spite of this bid for third-party insurance it was of course Push who copped it — not Catar.)

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Had I known, had I been able to imagine, what the weeks before the publication of "my" poem would be like, I'd never have touched the stuff. (No, I didn't slide into martyrdom easily.) Did I have to sow the grass that would grow on my own grave? Hadn't I been happy in "Zerin's bungalow," with the lamp shining on my hand? Steaming with self-hatred I felt like clawing my brains out. Supposing Zerin had shown the poems to some friend — who would now merrily proceed to blackmail me for the rest of my life? Worse: supposing Zerin's poems were already circulating "underground"? How was I to know? I had kept well away from those "self-editors" and they certainly had kept well away from me. Somebody, somewhere, some blasted professor who knew Zerin's early work (as I did not) was sure to blow the gaff. True, I had changed the poem's title from "Bats" to "Swallows"; I had replaced lines like: *"All-knowing, all-seeing, yet blind / in the caves of the living flesh"* by the less dicey: *"All-knowing, all-seeing, they sing,"* etc. But there was a limit to this softening up — unless I wanted to kill the poem altogether.

Yeah, all that fear for nothing! What I should have worried about was the "inner" meaning of those poems, not about so-called experts who, anyhow, for reasons I won't mention here, are no longer extant. (Good work, good work!) Though one critic in X, tucked away somewhere in the provinces, was clever and naughty enough to suggest that "Swallows" were unlikely birds in the context and should be replaced by "Vultures." (Naughty, because, as everybody knows, vultures happen only in other countries.) But I was too dumb to realize that no amount of soothing adverbs, slipped in here and there, to convey an "optimism which though not immediately apparent should be inferred" (as it said in the puff of the one and only edition), can undo the force of genius that has us by the throat.

Occasionally, not often, I would hug my dream of success and immortality to come. I knew with what desperate eagerness "Swallows" would be received. They hungered and I would give them bread, they thirsted, etc. Yes, for once, there would be bread — not a stone. And I, "dizzy with success," would spit on the lot of them: first of all, on Push-Catar, my benefactors, who used me as a meat chopper; on the literary gents from the highbrow "liberal" journals, that called me "Mole, ce crapule"; on all the girls who had turned their delicate noses up at me as if I stank. (I don't.) Let them look

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out, all of them! After such exaltation I'd sink back into my agonies and fears of disclosure.

And of course "Swallows" was received with strident enthusiasm, so wild and vociferous it seemed to trouble the silence in which we live. I had, after all, not been the only one who, on reading it, had wept as if a ton of granite had fallen off my chest. Naturally, there was in all that loud praise an element of relief at being able, for once, to say yes to an "official" writer, and with a smiling conscience, even a thinly veiled hope that "they" had seen the light and that underground and official literature might eventually become one. Poor suckers, so much for that!

From the moment "Swallows" appeared in the *Journal,* my days (and nights!) took on a different, gliding quality. Instead of the iron ring that had held my life in, there was now the soft, rounded hand of love. Wherever I went, someone would look round and smile with an extraordinary expression of sweetness and secret understanding. I'd had no idea there was so much — what shall I call it? — "melting goodness" on tap. The first to lend me a smile was the girl who sells newspapers in the village; her toffee-brown eyes sparkled, her little breasts rose like two dumplings under her dress. (Oh, lucky Zerin!) While Clara B., our resident, utterly flat-chested poetess, took her tray all the way round the cafeteria to pass by my table and then, too shy to raise her gauzy eyelids, walked on, tray and all, back to the counter.

The meeting with Jochum, unfunny author, usually pissed, of funny children's books, was less amusing. If somebody had gone up to Jochum and called him a hyena, Jochum would have screwed up his eyes, back to the furthest recesses of irrelevancy, and spoken thus: "Hyena with a *y*?" or "Ah, but a hyena is a useful animal." This clown got hold of me, taking my hand and looking at me searchingly, beseechingly. I winced. Here was the one who knew, the friend Zerin had shown his poems, in short, the executioner. But all Jochum wanted to deliver himself of was: "So, after all, you aren't the swine we thought you were." "We?" I shot back, relief turning to rancor, "and who are 'we'?" Jochum, pursing his lips in disgust as if my very voice belied the beauty of "Swallows" (it does), turned and shuffled off.

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The Mole triumphant! One by one I dropped Zerin's poems, at suitable intervals of course, into the jaws of my avid audience. No longer did I have to cool my heels or heart in editorial anterooms. "Come in, my dear chap, come in!" some daring editor of an equally daring journal would call through the open door (all doors now stood miraculously open). Treating me like an infant prodigy just emerged from the egg, with just a few bits of shell still clinging. How they all wanted to dip their little spoons into my "sincerity," slurp me up like so much yolk of egg or some patent medicine just come on to the market, guaranteed to restore failing powers. "Vitality" — "Genius of Youth"! I remembered hollow-cheeked Zerin and smirked. "And what did you do for me, you caterpillars, when I, the genius, was still alive? Did you protest against my arrest? All right, perhaps you did, between the sheets. Which didn't prevent you from expelling me from your editorial board the very same day or, rather, the day before." Nor did this gentry have the excuse of stupidity for they always fastened like bloodhounds on the bits that were my contributions to the poems. "Oh, there's just this one point: couldn't we have this admittedly exquisite line here fused, as it were. . . ." And for the fraction of a second I caught incredulity misting their accommodating eyes.

Then there were the very exclusive, very sophisticated parties, given for me, Mole, the darling of the intelligentsia. It was certainly instructive watching these twittering people who, on meeting me, would flounder between the deference they felt was due to a genius (a second Lermontov perhaps?) and the disrespect I, Mole, a creature that has to bite back to survive at all, seem to inspire. I soon came to know the symptoms: eyes, grown vague, shifting sideways, appealing for reassurance from bystanders; unpregnant pauses during which alternatives (I trust/I trust not) were run through like the petals of a daisy. I was also watching myself, but without pleasure, slipping and reslipping from my new, hard-come-by hauteur to previous Mole positions of spiked subservience and resentful spinelessness, upsetting people's much needed sense of continuity. Making people unsure of whether to kowtow or run should be a punishable offense in the troubled times we live in!

A strange byproduct of my dream, something I had not anticipated, was idleness, complete, utter idleness. Having nothing to do

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I did nothing. I no longer even bothered to tame Zerin's poems, finding it increasingly painful to listen to the strictures of editors who still homed, without fail, on the little that originated with me. Spongy with idlesness and fear, I slowly turned round the abyss, telling myself I was safe.

There was another, no less disturbing, aspect to this recklessness: I no longer found it in my heart to disfigure what was, after all, the one thing I'd come across in my life that was "pure." (Why "pure" in inverted commas, prey? Pure, just pure). Like a cardsharper, turned gambler, I was losing my grip and my winnings.

Official reaction, lukewarm at the best of times, became hostile the more magnificent, but also sombre and "negative," the poems I released grew, in fact, the more truly "Zerinian." My past services, my impeccable record of shifting and twisting to order, no longer seemed to count. Possibly "they" sensed that my former accommodating self was being usurped by something more sinister than one hopes to find in a contributor to the *Writers' Journal.* And as if to prove possession by some demon, I had taken to tramping the streets, endlessly, aimlessly, like an animal that flees from a slaughterhouse the exact location of which it doesn't know. The state of euphoria was over. Why hadn't I foreseen that the very day I dried up (and, after all, the number of Zerin's poems was limited) I'd be accused of willful refusal to publish, of "internal emigration"? How could I not have seen that the poems I had so far kept back — hymns bled clean of anything but despair and defiance — were in fact not publishable? Unless I wanted to go the way Zerin had gone. I wasn't ready for that.

There was still one hope: being let loose on a lecture tour abroad. "Mole, the genius, representing his country." In that case, I promised myself, I'd become a messenger boy on a motorbike, yes, roaring down those crazy motorways they had in those places. God, what bliss, no longer haltered, chafed by my own mediocrity, I'd race. . . . No, too dangerous! I'd better be a liftboy. A liftboy, sitting in his little cage, going up, going down, going up. . . . Dear God, since I wasn't fit to be a poet like Zerin, let me be a liftboy! It was then that I noticed the two men tailing me.

That night, going "home," I stumbled over Jochum, sprawled in front of "Zerin's bungalow." Poor hyena! I helped him up, stink-

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ing breath and all. "You know what?" he turned, incidentally barring the entrance to his place, "You know whom you remind me of? Ah? — Ah?" His red-filmed eyes winked at me horribly and he poked his fingers into my stubbly cheek. "You're ready — ah?" I fled.

Uncanny! The face that looked at me in the mirror was hollow, yellow like a lemon. What right had I to look like that? Seeing I was the author of those brilliant articles on "Abstractionism," etc.? Hadn't I eaten all the toads on offer, hadn't I walked through the dirt with splayed feet like a sow's? I wasn't the genius. I was just — what? Now then, let's be precise — or "concrete" as our betters would put it! What exactly was I? Nothing, of course, well, practically nothing. A bit of unsavory ways and means, sewagewise (who had flushed Zerin's poems down the lavatory?), perhaps, with luck, let's say, a murky channel that had surfaced and brought to light — what? I blinked at myself, pushing my mouth up Catar-wise to give weight to my deliberations. (How our enemies creep into and debase our very grimaces!) Surely this thing, this ugly mug, couldn't have brought to light, all right, to life (makes no difference in this wintry climate) the pure glory of poetry? The idea made me guffaw. Then I began to laugh, neigh, whinny, with pleasure, at the thought of the coup I had brought off, at the enormity I had committed. I, the Mole, had, in this cemetery of hope, singlehanded, singlepawed, if you like, resurrected the dead! This being so, I thought I'd better kiss my reflection in the mirror good-bye.

I knew then that I'd let them have every one of Zerin's poems and that I'd have to act with speed and circumspection. I remembered the critic in X, who had objected to "my" first published poem being called "Swallows" and who, in his far-away place, couldn't possibly have heard about me no longer being the darling of the Catars. I took the night train. All through the journey I sat in the dark compartment chuckling and giggling. The other passengers must have thought me insane. (Oh, no, don't try to get me on that one!) In the morning, face to face with the little chap, a provincial editor not without ambition, who, on beholding me, more or less went down on his knees (and why shouldn't he?), I deployed a couple of the old Mole tricks, flattered, coaxed, gave to understand that I had felt an irresistible urge to get out at his station as he had been the only one perceptive enough . . . etc.; I agreed (wholeheartedly) that

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the capital shouldn't get away with hogging all the literary glory; I allowed him to suggest that publication of my collected poems, undertaken with all possible speed (a point I laid great stress on) in the provinces and by an intelligent, sensitive editor, would be in the general interest — as well as to the glory of the fatherland. I also had an excellent meal during which I enjoined on my new friend the necessity of keeping dead silent about our plans as otherwise "the cosmopolitan lot" would give me no peace and I might have to retract my decision. We looked into each other's eyes, reciting bits of poetry ("mine"), even shedding a few tears (his). Before parting I handed him copies of the poems (all of them) together with the necessary signatures entitling him to proceed with publication. We shook hands (trembling, his) and I expressed my regrets that, owing to my travels which, as a true poet's, were never mapped out beforehand, he would not be able to reach me — hence no point of letting him have my address. After which —

Joyce Carol Oates

THE LADY WITH THE PET DOG

I.

Strangers parted as if to make way for him.

There he stood. He was there in the aisle, a few yards away, watching her.

She leaned forward at once in her seat, her hand jerked up to her face as if to ward off a blow — but then the crowd in the aisle hid him, he was gone. She pressed both hands against her cheeks. He was not there, she had imagined him.

"My God," she whispered.

She was alone. Her husband had gone out to the foyer to make a telephone call; it was intermission at the concert, a Thursday evening.

Now she saw him again, clearly. He was standing there. He was staring at her. Her blood rocked in her body, draining out of her head. . . . she was going to faint. . . . They stared at each other. They

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gave no sign of recognition. Only when he took a step forward did she shake her head *no — no — keep away.* It was not possible.

When her husband returned she was staring at the place in the aisle where her lover had been standing. Her husband leaned forward to interrupt that stare.

"What's wrong?" he said. "Are you sick?"

Panic rose in her in long shuddering waves. She tried to get to her feet, panicked at the thought of fainting here, and her husband took hold of her. She stood like an aged woman, clutching the seat before her.

At home he helped her up the stairs and she lay down. Her head was like a large piece of crockery that had to be held still, it was so heavy. She was still panicked. She felt it in the shallows of her face, behind her knees, in the pit of her stomach. It sickened her, it made her think of mucus, of something thick and gray congested inside her, stuck to her, that was herself and yet not herself, a poison.

She lay with her knees drawn up toward her chest, her eyes hotly open, while her husband spoke to her. She imagined that other man saying, *Why did you run away from me?* Her husband was saying other words. She tried to listen to them. He was going to call the doctor, he said, and she tried to sit up. "No, I'm all right now," she said quickly. The panic was like lead inside her, so thickly congested. How slow love was to drain out of her, how fluid and sticky it was inside her head!

Her husband believed her. No doctor. No threat. Grateful, she drew her husband down to her. They embraced, not comfortably. For years now they had not been comfortable together, in their intimacy and at a distance, and now they struggled gently as if the paces of this dance were too rigorous for them. It was something they might have known once, but had now outgrown. The panic in her thickened at this double betrayal: she drew her husband to her, she caressed him wildly, she shut her eyes to think about that other man.

A crowd of men and women parting, unexpectedly, and there he stood — There he stood — She kept seeing him, and yet her vision blotched at the memory. It had been finished between them, six months before, but he had come out here . . . and she had escaped him, now she was lying in her husband's arms, in his embrace, her face pressed against his. It was a kind of sleep, this lovemaking. She felt herself falling asleep, her body falling from her. Her eyes shut.

"I love you," her husband said fiercely, angrily.

She shut her eyes and thought of that other man, as if betraying him would give her life a center.

"Did I hurt you? Are you — ?" her husband whispered.

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Always this hot flashing of shame between them, the shame of her husband's near-failure, the clumsiness of his love — .

"You didn't hurt me," she said.

II.

They had said good-bye six months before. He drove her from Nantucket, where they had met, to Albany, New York, where she visited her sister. The hours of intimacy in the car had sealed something between them, a vow of silence and impersonality: she recalled the movement of the highways, the passing of other cars, the natural rhythms of the day hypnotizing her toward sleep while he drove. She trusted him, she could sleep in his presence. Yet she could not really fall asleep in spite of her exhaustion, and she kept jerking awake, frightened, to discover that nothing had changed — still the stranger who was driving her to Albany, still the highway, the sky, the antiseptic odor of the rented car, the sense of a rhythm behind the rhythm of the air that might unleash itself at any second. Everywhere on this highway, at this moment, there were men and women driving together, bonded together — what did that mean, to be together? What did it mean to enter into a bond with another person?

No, she did not really trust him; she did not really trust men. He would glance at her with his small cautious smile and she felt a declaration of shame between them.

Shame.

In her head she rehearsed conversations. She said bitterly, "You'll be relieved when we get to Albany. Relieved to get rid of me." They had spent so many days talking, confessing too much, driven to a pitch of childish excitement, laughing together on the beach, breaking into that pose of laughter that seems to eradicate the soul, so many days of this that the silence of the trip was like the silence of a hospital — all these surface noises, these rattles and hums, but an interior silence, a befuddlement. She said to him in her imagination, "One of us should die." Then she leaned over to touch him. She caressed the back of his neck. She said, aloud, "Would you like me to drive for a while?"

They stopped at a "picnic area" where other cars were stopped — couples, families — and walked together, smiling at their good luck. He put his arm around her shouders and she sensed how they were in a posture together, a man and a woman forming a posture, a figure, that someone might sketch and show to them. She said slowly, "I don't want to go back. . . ."

Silence. She looked up at him. His face was heavy with her words,

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as if she had pulled at his skin with her fingers. Children ran nearby and distracted him — yes, he was a father too, his children ran like that, they tugged at his skin with their light, busy fingers.

"Are you so unhappy?" he said.

"I'm not unhappy, back there. I'm nothing. There's nothing to me," she said.

They stared at each other. The sensation between them was intense, exhausting. She thought that this man was her Savior, that he had come to her at a time in her life when her life demanded completion, an end, a permanent fixing of all that was troubled and shifting and deadly. And yet it was absurd to think this. No person could save another. So she drew back from him and released him.

A few hours later they stopped at a gas station in a small city. She went to the women's rest room, having to ask the attendant for a key, and when she came back her eye jumped nervously onto the rented car — why? did she think he might have driven off without her? — onto the man, her friend, standing in conversation with the young attendant. Her friend was as old as her husband, over forty, with lanky, sloping shoulders, a full body, his hair thick, a dark, burnished red, a festive color that made her eye twitch a little — and his hands were always moving, always those rapid conversational circles, going nowhere, gestures that were a little aggressive and apologetic at once.

She put her hand on his arm, a claim. He turned to her and smiled and she felt that she loved him, that everything in her life had forced her to this moment and that she had no choice about it.

They sat in the car for two hours, in Albany, in the parking lot of a Howard Johnson's restaurant, talking, trying to figure out their past. There was no future. They concentrated on the past, the several days behind them, lit up with a hot, dazzling August sun, like explosions that already belonged to other people, to strangers. Her face was faintly reflected in the green-tinted curve of the windshield, but she could not have recognized that face. She began to cry, she told herself: *"I am not here, this will pass, this is nothing."* Still, she could not stop crying. What if a policeman ran up to the car and accused this man of molesting her? The muscles of her face were springy, like a child's, unpredictable muscles. He stroked her arms, her shoulders, trying to comfort her. "This is so hard . . . this is impossible, . . ." he said. She felt panic for the world outside this car, all that was not herself and this man, and at the same time she understood that she was free of him, as people are free of other people, she would leave him soon, safely, and within a few days he would have fallen into the past, the impersonal

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past. . . . What if someone, an ordinary husband and father, were to notice them in this car, were to run over and accuse her friend of upsetting her? She was much younger, she was girlish and frightened, she was not really here in this car saying these things. . . .

"I'm so ashamed of myself!" she said finally.

She returned to her husband and saw that another woman, a shadow-woman, had taken her place — noiseless and convincing, like a dancer, performing certain difficult steps. Her husband folded her in his arms and talked to her of his own loneliness, his worries about his business, his health, his mother, kept tranquilized and mute in a nursing home, and her spirit detached itself from her and drifted about the rooms of the large house she lived in, with her husband, a shadow-woman delicate and imprecise. There was no boundary to her, no edge. Alone, she took hot baths and sat exhausted in the steaming water, wondering at her perpetual exhaustion. All that winter she noticed the limp, languid weight of her arms, her veins bulging slightly with the pressure of her extreme weariness. *This is fate,* she thought, to be here and not there, to be one person and not another, a certain man's wife and not the wife of another man. The long, slow pain of this certainty rose in her, but it never became clear, it was baffling and imprecise. She could not be serious about it: she kept congratulating herself on her own good luck, to have escaped so easily, to have freed herself. So much love had gone into the first several years of her marriage that there wasn't much left, now, for another man. . . . She was certain of that. But the bath water made her dizzy, all that perpetual heat, and one day in January she drew a razor blade lightly across the inside of her arm, near the elbow, to see what would happen.

Afterward she wrapped a small towel around it, to stop the bleeding. The towel soaked through. She wrapped a bath towel around that and walked through the empty rooms of her home, not very worried, hardly aware of the stubborn seeping of blood. There was no boundary to her in this house, no precise limit. She could flow out like her own blood and come to no end.

Her husband telephoned her when he would be staying late at the plant. He talked to her always about his plans, his problems, his business friends, his future. It was obvious that he had a future. As he spoke she nodded to encourage him, and her heartbeat quickened with the memory of her own, personal shame, the shame of this man's particular, private wife. One evening at dinner he leaned forward and put his head in his arms, and fell asleep, like a child. She sat at the table with him for a while, watching him. His hair had gone gray, al-

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most white, at the temples — no one would guess that he was so quick, so careful a man, still fairly young about the eyes. She put her hand on his head, lightly, as if to prove to herself that he was real. He slept, exhausted.

One evening they went to a concert and she looked up to see her lover there, in the crowded aisle, in this city, watching her. He was standing there, with his overcoat on, watching her. She went cold. That morning the telephone had rung while her husband was still home, and she had heard him answer it, heard him hang up — it must have been a wrong number — and when the telephone rang again, at nine-thirty, she had been afraid to answer it for some reason. She had left home to be out of the range of that ringing but now, in this public place, in this busy auditorium, she found herself staring at that man, unable to make any sign to him, any gesture of recognition. . . .

He would have come to her but she shook her head. No. Stay away.

Her husband helped her out of the row of seats, saying, "Excuse us, please. Excuse us," so that strangers got to their feet, quickly, alarmed, to let them pass. Was that woman about to faint? What was wrong?

At home she felt the blood drain slowly back into her head. Her husband embraced her hips, pressing his face against her, in that silence that belonged to the earliest days of their marriage. She thought, *He will drive it out of me.* He made love to her and she was back in the auditorium again, sitting alone now that the concert was over. The stage was empty; the heavy velvet curtains had not been drawn; the musicians' chairs were empty, everything was silent and expectant; in the aisle her lover stood and smiled at her —. Her husband was impatient. He was apart from her, working on her, operating on her; and then, stricken, he whispered, "Did I hurt you?"

The telephone rang the next morning. Dully, sluggishly, she answered it. She recognized his voice at once — that "Anna?" with its lifting of the second syllable, questioning and apologetic and making its claim —. "Yes, what do you want?" she said.

"Just to see you. Please —."

"I can't."

"Anna, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to upset you —."

"I can't see you."

"Just for a few minutes — I have to talk to you —."

"But why, why now? Why now?" she said.

She heard her voice rising, but she could not stop it. He began to talk again, drowning her out. She remembered his rapid conversation.

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She remembered his gestures, the witty energetic circling of his hands.

"How are you? Please don't hang up!" he cried.

"I can't — I don't want to go through it again — ."

"I'm not going to hurt you. Just tell me how you are."

"Everything is the same."

"Everything is the same with me."

She looked up at the ceiling, shyly. "Your wife? Your children?"

"The same."

"Your son?"

"He's fine — ."

"I'm glad to hear that. I — ."

"Is it still the same with you, your marriage? Tell me what you feel. What are you thinking?"

"I don't know. . . ."

She remembered his intense, eager words, the movement of his hands, that impatient precise fixing of the air by his hands, the jabbing of his fingers.

"Do you love me?" he said.

She could not answer.

"I'll come over to see you," he said.

"No," she said.

What will come next, what will happen?

Flesh hardening on his body, aging. Shrinking. He will grow old, but not soft like her husband. They are two different types: he is nervous, lean, energetic, wise. She will grow thinner, as the tension radiates out from her backbone, wearing down her flesh. Her collar bones will jut out of her skin. Her husband, caressing her in their bed, will discover that she is another woman — she is not there with him — instead she is rising in an elevator in a downtown hotel, carrying a book as a prop, or walking quickly away from that hotel, her head bent and filled with secrets. Love, what to do with it. . . ? Useless as moths' wings, as moths' flutterings. . . . She feels the flutterings of silky, crazy wings in her chest.

He flew out to visit her every several weeks, staying at a different hotel each time. He telephoned her, and she drove down to park in an underground garage at the very center of the city.

She lay in his arms while her husband talked to her, miles away, one body fading into another. He will grow old, his body will change, she thought, pressing her cheek against the back of one of these men. If it was her lover, they were in a hotel room: always the propped-up little booklet describing the hotel's many services, with color photographs

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of its cocktail lounge and dining room and coffee shop. Grow old, leave me, die, go back to your neurotic wife and your sad, ordinary children, she thought, but still her eyes closed gratefully against his skin and she felt how complete their silence was, how they had come to rest in each other.

"Tell me about your life here. The people who love you," he said, as he always did.

One afternoon they lay together for four hours. It was her birthday and she was intoxicated with her good fortune, this prize of the afternoon, this man in her arms! She was a little giddy, she talked too much. She told him about her parents, about her husband. . . . "They were all people I believed in, but it turned out wrong. Now, I believe in you. . . ." He laughed as if shocked by her words. She did not understand. Then she understood. "But I believe truly in you. I can't think of myself without you," she said. . . . He spoke of his wife, her ambitions, her intelligence, her use of the children against him, her use of his younger son's blindness, all of his words gentle and hypnotic and convincing in the late afternoon peace of this hotel room . . . and she felt the terror of laughter, threatening laughter. Their words, like their bodies, were aging.

She dressed quickly in the bathroom, drawing her long hair up around the back of her head, fixing it as always, anxious that everything be the same. Her face was slightly raw, from his face. The rubbing of his skin. Her eyes were too bright, wearily bright. Her hair was blond but not so blond as it had been that summer in the white Nantucket air.

She ran water and splashed it on her face. She blinked at the water. Blind. Drowning. She thought with satisfaction that soon, soon, he would be back home, in that house on Long Island she had never seen, with that woman she had never seen, sitting on the edge of another bed, putting on his shoes. She wanted nothing except to be free of him. Why not be free? *Oh,* she thought suddenly, *I will follow you back and kill you. You and her and the little boy. What is there to stop me?*

She left him. Everyone on the street pitied her, that look of absolute zero.

III.

A man and a child, approaching her. The sharp acrid smell of fish. The crashing of waves. Anna pretended not to notice the father with his son — there was something strange about them. That frank,

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silent intimacy, too gentle, the man's bare feet in the water and the boy a few feet away, leaning away from his father. He was about nine years old and still his father held his hand.

A small yipping dog, a golden dog bounded near them.

Anna turned shyly back to her reading; she did not want to have to speak to these neighbors. She saw the man's shadow falling over her legs, then over the pages of her book, and she had the idea that he wanted to see what she was reading. The dog nuzzled her; the man called him away.

She watched them walk down the beach. She was relieved that the man had not spoken to her.

She saw them in town later that day, the two of them red-haired and patient, now wearing sandals, walking with that same look of care. The man's white shorts were soiled and a little baggy. His pullover shirt was a faded green. His face was broad, the cheekbones wide, spaced widely apart, the eyes stark in their sockets, as if they fastened onto objects for no reason, ponderous and edgy. The little boy's face was pale and sharp; his lips were perpetually parted.

Anna realized that the child was blind.

The next morning, early, she caught sight of them again. For some reason she went to the back door of her cottage. She faced the sea breeze eagerly. Her heart hammered. . . . She had been here, in her family's old house, for three days, alone, bitterly satisfied at being alone, and now it was a puzzle to her how her soul strained to fly outward, to meet with another person. She watched the man with his son, his cautious, rather stooped shoulders above the child's small shoulders.

The man was carrying something, it looked like a notebook. He sat on the sand, not far from Anna's spot of the day before, and the dog rushed up to them. The child approached the edge of the ocean, timidly. He moved in short jerky steps, his legs stiff. The dog ran around him. Anna heard the child crying out a word that sounded like "Ty" — it must have been the dog's name — and then the man joined in, his voice heavy and firm.

"Ty — ."

Anna tied her hair back with a yellow scarf and went down to the beach.

The red-haired man glanced around at her. He smiled. She stared past him at the waves. To talk to him or not to talk — she had the freedom of that choice. For a moment she felt that she had made a mistake, that the child and the dog would not protect her, that behind

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this man's ordinary, friendly face there was a certain arrogant maleness — then she relented, she smiled shyly.

"A nice house you've got there," the man said.

She nodded her thanks.

The man pushed his sunglasses up on his forehead. Yes, she recognized the eyes of the day before — intelligent and nervous, the sockets pale, untanned.

"Is that your telephone ringing?" he said.

She did not bother to listen. "It's a wrong number," she said.

Her husband calling: she had left home for a few days, to be alone.

But the red-haired man, settling himself on the sand, seemed to misinterpret this. He smiled in surprise, one corner of his mouth higher than the other. He said nothing. Anna wondered: *What is he thinking?* The dog was leaping about her, panting against her legs, and she laughed in embarrassment. She bent to pet it, grateful for its busyness. "Don't let him jump up on you," the man said. "He's a nuisance."

The dog was a small golden retriever, a young dog. The blind child, standing now in the water, turned to call the dog to him. His voice was shrill and impatient.

"Our house is the third one down — the white one," the man said.

She turned, startled. "Oh, did you buy it from Dr. Patrick? Did he die?"

"Yes, finally. . . ."

Her eyes wandered nervously over the child and the dog. She felt the nervous beat of her heart out to the very tips of her fingers, the fleshy tips of her fingers: little hearts were there, pulsing. *What is he thinking?* The man had opened his notebook. He had a piece of charcoal and he began to sketch something.

Anna looked down at him. She saw the top of his head, his thick red hair, the freckles on his shoulders, the quick, deft movement of his hand. Upside down, Anna herself being drawn. She smiled in surprise.

"Let me draw you. Sit down," he said.

She knelt awkwardly a few yards away. He turned the page of the sketchpad. The dog ran to her and she sat, straightening out her skirt beneath her, flinching from the dog's tongue. "Ty!" cried the child. Anna sat, and slowly the pleasure of the moment began to glow in her; her skin flushed with gratitude.

She sat there for nearly an hour. The man did not talk much. Back and forth the dog bounded, shaking itself. The child came to sit near them, in silence. Anna felt that she was drifting into a kind of

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trance, while the man sketched her, half a dozen rapid sketches, the surface of her face given up to him. "Where are you from?" the man asked.

"Ohio. My husband lives in Ohio."

She wore no wedding band.

"Your wife—," Anna began.

"Yes?"

"Is she here?"

"Not right now."

She was silent, ashamed. She had asked an improper question. But the man did not seem to notice. He continued drawing her, bent over the sketchpad. When Anna said she had to go, he showed her the drawings—one after another of her, Anna, recognizably Anna, a woman in her early thirties, her hair smooth and flat across the top of her head, tied behind by a scarf. "Take the one you like best," he said, and she picked one of her with the dog in her lap, sitting very straight, her brows and eyes clearly defined, her lips girlishly pursed, the dog and her dress suggested by a few quick irregular lines.

"Lady with pet dog," the man said, smiling oddly.

She spent the rest of that day reading, nearer her cottage. It was not really a cottage—it was a two-story house, large and ungainly and weathered. It was mixed up in her mind with her family, her own childhood, and she glanced up from her book, perplexed, as if waiting for one of her parents or her sister to come up to her. Then she thought of the man with the red hair, the man with the blind child, the man with the dog, and she could not concentrate on her reading. Someone—probably her father—had marked a passage that must be important, but she kept reading and rereading it: *We try to discover in things, endeared to us on that account, the spiritual glamour which we ourselves have cast upon them; we are disillusioned, and learn that they are in themselves barren and devoid of the charm which they owed, in our minds, to the association of certain ideas. . . .*

She thought again of the man on the beach. She lay the book aside and thought of him: his eyes, his aloneness, his drawings of her.

They began seeing each other after that. He came to her front door in the evening, without the child; he drove her into town for dinner. She was shy and extremely pleased. The darkness of the expensive restaurant released her; she heard herself chatter; she leaned forward and seemed to be offering her face up to him, listening to him. He talked about his work on a Long Island newspaper and she seemed to be listening to him, as she stared at his face, arranging her own face into

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the expression she had seen in that charcoal drawing. Did he see her like that, then? — girlish and withdrawn and patrician? She felt the weight of his interest in her, a force that fell upon her like a blow. A repeated blow. Of course he was married, he had children — of course she was married, permanently married. This flight from her husband was not important. She had left him before, to be alone, it was not important. Everything in her was slender and delicate and not important.

They walked for hours after dinner, looking at the other strollers, the weekend visitors, the tourists, the couples like themselves. Surely they were mistaken for a couple, a married couple. *This is the hour in which everything is decided,* Anna thought. They had both had several drinks and they talked a great deal. Anna found herself saying too much, stopping and starting giddily. She put her hand to her forehead, feeling faint.

"It's from the sun — you've had too much sun —," he said.

At the door to her cottage, on the front porch, she heard herself asking him shyly if he would like to come in. She allowed him to lead her inside, to close the door. *This is not important,* she thought clearly, *he doesn't mean it, he doesn't love me, nothing will come of it.* She was frightened, yet it seemed to her necessary to give in: she had to leave Nantucket with that act completed, an act of adultery, an accomplishment she would take back to Ohio and to her marriage.

Then, incredibly, she heard herself asking: "Do you . . . do you love me?"

"You're so beautiful!" he said, amazed.

She felt this beauty, shy and glowing and centered in her eyes. He stared at her. In this large, drafty house, alone together, they were like accomplices, conspirators. She could not think: how old was she? which year was this? They had done something unforgivable together, and the knowledge of it was tugging at their faces. A cloud seemed to pass over her. She felt herself smiling shrilly.

Afterward, a peculiar raspiness, a dryness of breath. He was silent. She felt a strange, idle fear, a sense of the danger outside this room and this old, comfortable bed — a danger that would not recognize her as the lady in that drawing, the lady with the pet dog. There was nothing to say to this man, this stranger. She felt the beauty draining out of her face, her eyes fading.

"I've got to be alone," she told him.

He left, and she understood that she would not see him again. She stood by the window of the room, watching the ocean. A sense of shame overpowered her: it was smeared everywhere on her body, the smell

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of it, the richness of it. She tried to recall him and his face was confused in her memory: she would have to shout to him across a jumbled space, she would have to wave her arms wildly. *You love me! You must love me!* But she knew he did not love her, and she did not love him, he was a man who drew everything up into himself, like all men, walking away, free to walk away, free to have his own thoughts, free to envision her body, all the secrets of her body. . . . And she lay down again in the bed, feeling how heavy this body had become, her insides heavy with shame, the very backs of her eyelids coated with shame.

"This is the end of one part of my life," she thought.

But in the morning the telephone rang. She answered it. It was her lover: they talked brightly and happily. She could hear the eagerness in his voice, the love in his voice, that same still, sad amazement — she understood how simple life was, there were no problems.

They spent most of their time on the beach, with the child and the dog. He joked and was serious, at the same time. He said, once, "You have defined my soul for me," and she laughed to hide her alarm. In a few days it was time for her to leave. He got a sitter for the boy and took the ferry with her to the mainland, then rented a car to drive her up to Albany. She kept thinking: *Now something will happen. It will come to an end.* But most of the drive was silent and hypnotic. She wanted him to joke with her, to say again that she had defined his soul for him, but he drove fast, he was serious, she distrusted the hawkish look of his profile — she did not know him at all. At a gas station she splashed her face with cold water. Alone in the grubby little restroom, shaky and very much alone. In such places are women totally alone with their bodies. The body grows heavier, more evil, in such silence. . . . On the beach everything had been noisy with sunlight and gulls and waves; here, as if run to earth, everything was cramped and silent and dead.

She went outside, squinting. There he was, talking with the station attendant. She could not think as she returned to him whether she wanted to live or not.

She stayed in Albany for a few days, then flew home to her husband. He met her at the airport, near the luggage counter, where her three pieces of pale brown luggage were brought to him on a conveyer belt, to be claimed by him. He kissed her on the cheek. They shook hands, a little embarrassed. She had come home again.

"How will I live out the rest of my life?" she wondered.

In January her lover spied on her: she glanced up and saw him, in a public place, in the DeRoy Symphony Hall. She was paralyzed with

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fear. She nearly fainted. In this faint she felt her husband's body, loving her, working its love upon her, and she shut her eyes harder to keep out the certainty of his love — sometimes he failed at loving her, sometimes he succeeded, it had nothing to do with her or her pity or her ten years of love for him, it had nothing to do with a woman at all. It was a private act accomplished by a man, a husband or a lover, in communion with his own soul, his manhood.

Her husband was forty-two years old now, growing slowly into middle age, getting heavier, softer. Her lover was about the same age, narrower in the shoulders, with a full, solid chest, yet lean, nervous. She thought, in her paralysis, of men and how they love freely and eagerly so long as their bodies are capable of love, love for a woman: and then, as love fades in their bodies, it fades from their souls and they become immune and immortal and ready to die.

Her husband was a little rough with her, as if impatient with himself. "I love you," he said fiercely, angrily. And then, ashamed, he said, "Did I hurt you . . . ?"

"You didn't hurt me," she said.

Her voice was too shrill for their embrace.

While he was in the bathroom she went to her closet and took out that drawing of the summer before. There she was, on the beach at Nantucket, a lady with a pet dog, her eyes large and defined, the dog in her lap hardly more than a few snarls, a few coarse soft lines of charcoal . . . her dress smeared, her arms oddly limp . . . her hands not well drawn at all. . . . She tried to think: did she love the man who had drawn this? did he love her? The fever in her husband's body had touched her and driven her temperature up, and now she stared at the drawing with a kind of lust, fearful of seeing an ugly soul in that woman's face, fearful of seeing the face suddenly through her lover's eyes. She breathed quickly and harshly, staring at the drawing.

And so, the next day, she went to him at his hotel. She wept, pressing against him, demanding of him, "What do you want? Why are you here? Why don't you let me alone?" He told her that he wanted nothing. He expected nothing. He would not cause trouble.

"I want to talk about last August," he said.

"We are both married permanently," she said.

She was hypnotized by his gesturing hands, his nervousness, his obvious agitation. He kept saying, "I understand. I understand that. I am making no claims upon you."

They became lovers again.

He called room service for something to drink and they sat side

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by side on his bed, looking through a copy of the *New Yorker,* laughing at the cartoons. It was so peaceful in this room, so complete. They were on a holiday. It was a secret holiday. Four-thirty in the afternoon, on a Friday, an ordinary Friday: a secret holiday.

"I won't bother you again," he said.

He flew back to see her again in March, and in late April. He telephoned her from his hotel — a different hotel each time — and she came down to him at once. She rose to him in various elevators, she knocked on the doors of various rooms, she stepped into his embrace, breathless and guilty and already angry with him, pleading with him. One morning in May, when he telephoned, she pressed her forehead against the doorframe and could not speak. He kept saying, "What's wrong? Can't you talk? Aren't you alone?" She felt that she was going insane. Her head would burst. Why, why did he love her, why did he pursue her? Why did he want her to die?

She went to him in the hotel room. A familiar room: had they been here before? "Everything is repeating itself. Everything is stuck," she said. He framed her face in his hands and said that she looked thinner — was she sick? — what was wrong? She shook herself free. He, her lover, looked about the same. There was a small, angry pimple on his neck. He stared at her, eagerly and suspiciously. Did she bring bad news?

"So you love me? You love me?" she asked.

"Why are you so angry?"

"I want to be free of you. The two of us free of each other."

"That isn't true — you don't want that — ."

He embraced her. She was wild with that old, familiar passion for him, her body clinging to his, her arms not strong enough to hold him. Ah, what despair! — what bitter hatred she felt! — she needed this man for her salvation, he was all she had to live for, and yet she could not believe in him. He embraced her thighs, her hips, kissing her, pressing his warm face against her, and yet she could not believe in him, not really. She needed him in order to live, but he was not worth her love, he was not worth her dying. . . . She promised herself this: when she got back home, when she was alone, she would draw the razor more deeply across her arm.

The telephone rang and he answered it: a wrong number.

"Jesus," he said.

They lay together, still. She imagined their posture like this, the two of them one figure, one substance; and outside this room and this bed there was a universe of disjointed, separate things, blank things, that

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had nothing to do with them. She would not be Anna out there, the lady in the drawing. He would not be her lover.

"I love you so much. . . ." she whispered.

"Please don't cry! We have only a few hours, please. . . ."

It was absurd, their clinging together like this. She saw them as a single figure in a drawing, their arms and legs entwined, their heads pressing mutely together. Helpless substance, so heavy and warm and doomed. It was absurd that any human being should be so important to another human being. She wanted to laugh: a laugh might free them both.

She could not laugh.

Some time later he said, as if they had been arguing, "Look. It's you. You're the one who doesn't want to get married. You lie to me — ."

"Lie to you?"

"You love me but you won't marry me, because you want something left over — . Something not finished — . All your life you can attribute your misery to me, to our not being married — you are using me — ."

"Stop it! You'll make me hate you!" she cried.

"You can say to yourself that you're miserable because of *me*. We will never be married, you will never be happy, neither one of us will ever be happy — ."

"I don't want to hear this!" she said.

She pressed her hands flatly against her face.

She went to the bathroom to get dressed. She washed her face and part of her body, quickly. The fever was in her, in the pit of her belly. She would rush home and strike a razor across the inside of her arm and free that pressure, that fever.

The impatient bulging of her veins: an ordeal over.

The demand of the telephone's ringing: that ordeal over.

The nuisance of getting the car and driving home, in all that five o'clock traffic: an ordeal too much for a woman of her size.

The movement of this stranger's body in hers: over, finished.

Now, dressed, a little calmer, they held hands and talked. They had to talk swiftly, to get all their news in: he did not trust the people who worked for him, he had faith in no one, his wife had moved to a textbook publishing company and was doing well, she had inherited a Ben Shahn painting from her father and wanted to "touch it up a little" — she was crazy! — his blind son was at another school, doing fairly well, in fact his children were all doing fairly well in spite of the stupid mistake of their parents' marriage — and what about her? what about

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her life? She told him in a rush the one thing he wanted to hear: that she lived with her husband lovelessly, the two of them polite strangers, sharing a bed, lying side by side in the night in that bed, bodies out of which souls had fled. There was no longer even any shame between them.

"And what about me? Do you feel shame with me, still?" he asked her anxiously.

She did not answer. She kissed him and prepared to leave. The last five minutes had been so good, so fine, that she felt strangely happy. It was like the first day of their meeting, on the beach, Anna self-conscious and exhilarated by this red-haired man's presence. Only to exist in the same world with him! — did she really want any more? And it seemed to her, suddenly, that their love might possibly come to a conclusion. They would marry, perhaps. Or break off their relationship. They would come to rest permanently in each other, pressed permanently together, or they would grow old and forget each other and be free forever. . . .

"You look so beautiful. You look so happy," he said, as if jealous at this life inside her, this radiance he could not share. What, was it beginning all over again? Their love beginning again, in spite of them? "Why do you look so happy? Why?"

"Do I look happy?" she said, startled. "I don't know — I can't help myself — ."

Ronald Sukenick

From OUT

It all comes together. Don't fall. Each of us carries a stick of dynamite. Concealed on his person. That does several things. One it forms a bond. Two it makes you feel special. Three it's mute articulation of the conditions we live in today I mean not only us but everybody the *zeitgeist* you might say if not the human condition itself and keeps you in touch with reality. This is your stick. Don't fall. We know one among us is a government agent that's inevitable. Maybe it's you. Maybe it's me. The way we deal with that is as long as everyone does

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his job what's the difference. You're either part of the plot or part of the counterplot. Everybody's got to be either one or the other they all have their own opinions about which they are. Personally that's not part of my assignment. Part of it is having meets. This is a meet. The way you have meets is you take out your stick of dynamite that's your i. d. Don't fall. This is a two person meet there are bigger ones. When we get all our dynamite together we have a bomb. Then we set it off. It's all chance. Don't trust anyone you don't know that's the big thing. It's all who you like who you can work with who you fuck. Personal affinity. Of course we don't have real names we have aliases. Today I'm Harrold. Two r's. Tomorrow I might be someone else. Don't fall. Of course all this probably sounds wacky to you. That's because none of it is true. It's just a joke a way we have of testing people's reactions. The dynamite stick's a dud. Light the fuse and see. Or maybe you better not. Maybe it'll blow your head off. Well you never know till you try. Right?

I'm disappointed says President Nixon. They edge across the window ledge seven floors up working their way to the left dynamite stick in one hand the other bloodied fingertips clutching grips in stone. Beneath them long rolling lawn red brick slate shrubbery crowds of disconsolate children clump disperse circulate. Reports of fires fire-bombs bomb scares window smashing assaults.

I'm disappointed she repeats. Oops. She lurches sickeningly as her foot slips on the edge does an odd dance with the wall ends holding on with both hands feet firm dynamite clamped between her teeth.

Don't fall says Harrold.

I find this ridiculous mumbles President Nixon dynamite wobbling in her mouth. I come here to meet the Admiral and I find myself creeping across a window ledge with a stick of dynamite between my teeth. This isn't what I have in mind. At all. At all at all. What I want is wisdom. Enlightenment. How to live. I want to talk to the Admiral.

Harrold guffaws. I can tell you what he's going to say he mimics the old man. Plenny smokin drinkin fuckin. That's what he always says. He's just an old man.

They reach a window. Harrold winks and motions her to look inside. Inside a blond girl nude to the waist and wearing bobbysox hovers over a scrawny adolescent boy tied to a wooden chair his head hanging like a wilted flower. As they watch she grabs him by the jaws with one hand forcing his mouth open inserts a gleaming knife and severs his tongue. Blood covers his chin the severed tongue bounces off his

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chest and lands in his lap where it wags horribly several times in a growing pool of blood. Then she takes hold of her breast and shoves it in the boy's mouth which makes sucking motions.

President Nixon looks from the window to Harrold. Is this true she says.

9

Yo. calling all cars 7 3 10 bullseye pat em on a po po proceed with caution tough titty wrecks rex Rx i d yoo hoo hoo yoo.

This is an intercept says Scott. It's from the Commissioner.

Whose side is he on Nixie asks.

Nobody knows says Ova. What's it mean.

God knows says Rex.

It's all a lot of shid to me Jojo says. I just pass it on I do my best.

How about asking the Commissioner says Rex.

If you can find him Scott says.

Toro says nothing.

All right says Ova. Seven plus three is ten. This is where it begins. Everybody set his watch ahead that way we have nine minutes leeway all the time. The countdown starts with nine.

Okay let's go Rex says. The alarm rings at zero.

Are you President Nixon asks Scott.

You're not allowed to ask that kind of question says Nixie. President Nixon is just long for Nixie.

Oh. I thought it was the other way around.

Rex and Ova go out the door together. A light is out on the landing. Rex touches Ova's arm and signals wait. Back against wall he makes his way down the stairs step by step. His hand tightens around the roll of nickels in his pocket. No one there. He waves her on. They pick their way through the garbage on the sidewalk.

Are the meets bugged she asks.

Yes. But we don't say anything that's true. That way it doesn't matter.

We better hurry.

8
7
6

I've got the power

The what.

I've got the POWER.

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What are you trying to freak me out.

Rex reaches down into his pants and pulls out his stick of dynamite I'm it he says he holds it up.

You're it.

I'm it.

So. You're it.

That's right so don't fuck around with me or I'm liable to blow us both up. Once my fuse is lit it's out of my hands.

So you think you're it she reaches down her dress pulls out

her stick of dynamite I'm it.

Rex goes pale. You're it then he says this is it he takes out his matches. You want to go first.

You go first says Alma Rex lights his fuse shuts his eyes tight puts his free finger in his ear.

Tell me a little bit about yourself says Alma. How did

a nice boy like you end up this way. Where did we fail you.

Rex opens his eyes when the fuse is lit history cancels out he says he puts the dynamite in his mouth his other finger in his other ear his eyes focus on the fuse as it burns shorter they grow larger larger more crossed they're bulging out of his head BANG. The dynamite goes off like a trick cigar Rex falls to the floor.

Rex screams Alma. Rex. Rex Rex Rex Rex she's all over him kissing him hugging him feeling his heart his brow taking his pulse rubbing his dick Rex opens his eyes wipes a little soot off his face that's all he asks.

I love you says Alma.

Your turn undress says Rex she takes her clothes off lies

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down on the bed.

You're it you know the rules says Rex Alma nods Rex lights her dynamite imagine it's the hardhats says Rex he sticks the end up her vagina Alma groans shuts her eyes lies frozen how did we get into this says Rex. Why are we here. Why are we doing this to ourselves. What's the point of it all.

Data accumulates obscurity persists says Alma the fuse burns down to the dynamite there's an instant's pause then a sizzling sound they look at one another wide-eyed.

A dud whispers Rex a DUD. It's a new world.

Now we can settle down get married and lead happy normal lives says Alma she takes the dynamite out of her cunt.

Get dressed we're going to find a justice of the peace says Rex they leave get married go shopping in the supermarket come back with paper bags full of good things to eat.

You put the stuff away dear I'll start cooking says Alma.

What are we having for dinner says Rex.

Tongue.

Tongue.

Yes I think of it as your tongue. I love tongue there's something so male about it what do you suppose that is they tickle one another.

How do you cook it says Rex.

Take the tongue says Alma. Boil a pot of water put it in. Add a bouquet garni of marjoram thyme basil and bay leaf. Allow simmer.

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Prepare three medium onions whole two large carrots four stalks celery with leaves seven and a half sprigs parsley eight peppercorns and at the right moment pop them into the pot. Allow simmer. Consult the stars and jab occasionally with fork when it stops flinching remove from fire immerse in icy water for thirty seconds peel and trim. Do not remove the schlung repeat do not remove the schlung. Return to

boiling water briefly. Carve and serve.

Sounds scrumchy dear.

She wiggles her shoulders and after dinner you know what.

What.

Make bunnies.

Ah hah hah.

He reads the paper she cooks when it's done she carves starting with the very tip the first incision is the circumcision she sings gaily she slips it onto his plate. Followed by some nice firm red middle slices he pounds the table.

What is this I want the schlung.

5

I've got a short circuit listen to this. This morning I get up I check the ocean out for whales as usual the young housewife next door steps into the patio wearing an unbelievably short red minidress now get this SHE BENDS OVER to pet the cat she stays that way thighs hams crack all BARE and gleaming in the sun I can't believe [it].

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* * *

[She] drops it on the ground glances up at your window aims and bends over stays there till she feels your eyes burning into her soft hams branding R on one S on the other bears the heat of it as long as she can then stands up and scurries back inside. Her name is Pixie. You love her. God knows what will happen tomorrow but much remains today for example when you leave here you meet Empty Fox. Now I have no proof of it but I believe that this young woman Pixie is a friend of Empty Fox. There's your connection.

Skuul lowers his gun. Sukenick gets up and touches his shoulder your analysis is a work of art. It moves. It moves me. It makes deep nonsense of my trivial sense.

In other words I've failed again he hands over his gun Sukenick takes it aims at Skuul's forehead says your fate is failure mine is flux the top of Skuul's head disappears in a pink splash accompanied by a loud bang.

All this happens in Chamberlin South Dakota which is on the east bank of the Missouri River the Missouri is wide enough around here let me tell you get a ride in a semi across to Reliance all high barren bluffs on the other side that's where you leave the farms behind and the prairie starts rough rolling scrubby cattle ranges and you start

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seeing them cowboy hats and there's always high mountains somewhere over the horizon and that's where the wind starts streaming glaciers rip out of the north slam into the highway pushing cars over a whole lane I get a ride in a pickup truck have to just about lie flat in the bed not to get blown away I tell you that wind was aiming to blow

South Dakota over into Nebraska and maybe the whole damn mess into the Gulf of Mexico we go through Kennebec Presho Vivian Murdo in Kadoka we stop to give a ride to this Indian he leaps in huddles down into his denim jacket expressionless the truck cuts through the Badlands I jump from one side to the other to see the colors incredible

formations far out he sits in the bottom of the truck eyes closed in Wall we stop for gas he opens his eyes. How-kola get your lousy bad prana workshoes off my forty-two dollar Tony Lama boots he says.

Sorry I say I move my feet.

He nods.

4

I wrote that six months before the garage door came down on my head. But this is a subject I don't like thinking about too eerie. All I know is I'm getting messages I don't know where they come from or who else gets them it's a mystery to me I just pass it on and hope

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it comes together this is a message. Part of the message is get a road map all these places are real even the more unlikely ones I've traveled among them slept in their campsites their motels form is when you look back and see your footprints in the sand.

* * *

The dream is about getting mugged I write.
On the Lower East Side late at night it says.
On the Lower East Side late at night I write.
Somebody comes up behind Roland and puts a knife to his

throat maybe it's Jojo.

Somebody comes up behind Roland and puts a knife to his throat I think it is Jojo.

Hand over your wallet or you're dead says Jojo this is on a

dark sidestreet hand over your wallet or you're dead says Jojo this is on a dark sidestreet about two AM no one around Roland tries an elbow to Jojo's ribs the blade edge saws across his adam's apple okay okay anything says Roland I should kill you for that says Jojo no

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wallet in pockets says Roland he can feel blood running down the front of his neck get it out quick and don't do nothing sudden Roland fishes out his wallet remembers a story about a girl held up at gunpoint handing over her money then getting shot anyway Jojo grabs the wallet at

that moment Roland smashes his fist up against the wrist of Jojo's knife hand whirls slams Jojo's temple with his elbow kicks him in the balls picks up the wallet and knife helps Jojo to his feet for some dreadful reason Roland has to help Jojo to the Avenue he puts Jojo's arm around

his neck half drags half walks him down the street Jojo all the while muttering I'm gonna getchew man gonna cutchew up gimme back my knife you cocksuckuh gonna get my friends gimme it now maybe I letchew alone gonna kill you cocksuckuh maybe this week maybe next

when they reach the Avenue Jojo won't let Roland go Roland heads for his building you gonna take me up to your place you mothafuck I'm gonna kill you cocksuckinmothafuckuh two men are talking in the vestibule Roland knows one of them help he won't let go says Roland

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use that knife says the man it says. Use that knife says the man. This dream completely changes Roland's life.

This dream completely changes Roland's life.

It has seven meanings it says it has seven meanings three

* * *

happening he feels empty. And expectant 987654321.

O. Omphalos. Roland casts the I Ching it says.

Roland takes out his copy of The Book of Changes. What should I do now he asks he casts the coins. Roland casts the hexagram

* * *

Get out. Who are you.

Name's Tommy I turn up. You want your message or not.

What message.

From Toro from our friends you want it or not.

Are you a member of our friends.

Would I know about it if I wasn't a member you want it or not.

From Toro.

Yeah.

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Toro's dead.
It's his dying message.
What is it Tommy pulls out a scrap of paper it says
sale

not
seize
what's that supposed to mean says Roland.
You're supposed to know now you have to give me an answer

we're having a meet Roland turns the scrap of paper over writes hands it back to Tommy.
i 1 it says. What's that supposed to mean.
Figure it out says Roland he pulls his knife it has a matchstick

* * *

Desert Country just outside of town he crosses the Continental Divide now he's in the West. The moon is full he can see he's moving into hilly rangeland grass sage chaparral his forty-two dollar Tony Lama cowboy boots feel right at home somewhere just over the horizon high

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mountains this is fun. He walks for hours plays tag with tumbleweed watches falling stars high on the smell of sage plenty of moonlight no fatigue. The moon goes down before dawn he takes shelter next to a rock as he nods asleep he hears cattle lowing in the distance he

awakes in the early sun stiff cold surrounded by beautiful grazing horned animals tan whiterumped white chestpatterns darker head markings when he gets up they freeze for an instant run off with amazing speed disappearing up a hill like antelope in a cave painting. He

walks southsoutheast according to his map there should be a dirt road somewhere in that direction he walks for many hours this time he's tired he's hot he's thirsty he's lost he hears the sound of the Brooklyn Dodgers playing in Ebbets Field before a sellout crowd a hallucination

* * *

Viking waves toward the hills at the edges of the crowd this is the freakout tent he says is that you.

No says Roland.

You better tell them he hands Roland a mike it's not me

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3

Do you play an instrument.
No.
Then I don't understand.

From the first time I saw you I knew I'd like you.
That's very sweet.
Is your husband away.

Yes he is.
You must be a little lonely.
A little.

Perhaps you could use a little company this evening.
That's possible.
What's your name.

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Pixie what's yours.
R.
R. Are you the one who sent this weird mash note she pulls

* * *

R watches the sunset. In front of his view of the sunset is a billboard of the sunset. Imminence of horror absence of joy. Strange huge footprints have been discovered in the northwest. R has the itch

to travel again he feels slightly insecure about being in California as if the whole thing is liable to break off and sink at any time. He listens to the silence of the ocean the near silence of the ocean. The ocean

2

February 8. Sailor comes over what's up says R Sailor shrugs. You feel it too Sailor nods what are we in two. Check two minutes leeway we

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better hurry Sailor says they go for a walk along the piers is it the eclipse. Maybe Sailor says what are we going to do says R. Sailor sits

1

Wake up stop this is it drop everything stop all this is a message

you've been reading now throw it away stop the wind is blowing

the tide is flowing stop finish up and get out stop this is this this is

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* * *

Sailor the wind fills the sail the boat moves out with the tide sun low

* * *

way out this

* * *

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DOCUMENTS

WRITING IN BYELORUSSIA

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: *Translation of a speech which Vasil' Bykov gave at a closed session of the 1966 Fifth Congress of Byelorussian Writers at Minsk. That may sound like far away and long ago; but to the best of our knowledge, after carefully checking its authenticity and provenance, we believe it has not been published before, and the things that Bykov says are as relevant today as when he said them.*

Vasil' Bykov is a very courageous and uncompromising writer, rather of the Solzhenitsyn stamp. He has had two novels published; he writes in Byelorussian and translates his own work into an extremely good, muscular Russian. The two novels (or strictly speaking, novellas) were both published in Novy Mir. *The first appeared in 1966. Called* The Dead Feel No Pain, *it is a cool and disillusioned look at war, very far removed from the usual Soviet heroic jingoism, and he was roundly attacked by Soviet generals for slandering the glorious Soviet Army. The second was published in* Novy Mir *No. 5 of 1970. This is an even more remarkable work, entitled* Sotnikov. *It is published by Dutton in New York and by The Bodley Head in London entitled* The Ordeal.

There is much that can be said about the successful progress of Byelorussian literature if one looks at it from the viewpoint of certain of yesterday's speakers, but this Fifth Writers' Congress is not simply an occasion for self-congratulation, and therefore I believe we should be discussing other matters as well.

Unfortunately I cannot share the optimistic assumptions of yesterday's speakers about the excellence of our literary achievements. . . .

For two years running the Lenin Prize Committee has not awarded any prizes for literature. Literature is not only forfeiting the respect of the leadership, but is even failing to compete for the attention of the readers, who are deserting us in hundreds of thousands to fill the stadia with armies of rabid sports fans — a unique, not to say shameful reflection on an age which calls itself civilized. Whatever anybody else may feel, these facts provoke me to certain rather depressing reflections. How has it come about that our literature, which has enriched mankind with works of genius, should have reached a point where for two

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years in succession not one book has appeared which deserves the award of a state prize? And why are the prizes for non-Russian literature held, to put it mildly, in such low esteem that even when they are awarded they languish in oblivion for months on end and nothing is heard of who has won them or of when the awards are to be made?

Compared with the economic and technological achievements which are spreading the fame of our country throughout the world, it is quite obvious that our literature is in a state of crisis. Well may people wonder why it is that so much is talked about literature, so much concern shown for it, so much careful guidance lavished on it. Why, in that case, is the infant so puny?

I believe that the cause of this evident decline is to be found in the very place where the progress of our literature was planned. Something very simple has happened: where literature is concerned, somehow or other all sense of proportion has been lost and literature has been done to death by an excess of guidance and tutelage. (*Applause*)

Whilst our economy has passed beyond the phase of "voluntarism,"[1] it must be frankly stated that it flourishes in literature to this day. Literature is far more of a "command economy" than the economy itself. Our economic life is evolving toward relationships that are increasingly more functional and sensible, yet literature has remained in the state that agriculture was in until recently (*applause*): anyone concerned with it was only too ready to charge in with some harebrained scheme and interfere with what in any case is not the world's most productive patch of land.[2]

Those who do not realize that art and literature are governed by certain laws which cannot be arbitrarily tampered with or misdirected are very, very much in error. Unfortunately — or rather, fortunately — such laws exist. What is more, like all just laws they are inexorable and visit severe retribution on those who infringe upon them.

But for the artist the most grievous paradox lies in the fact that the laws of art frequently do not conform to the laws which govern society at any given stage. Indeed, they are almost always in opposition. In life, the ideal society is one in which there is a minimum of conflict, whereas art demands the reverse. In life, the best characters are balanced and straightforward; art thrives on complexity and contradiction. When creating a work, the artist is either divided between these two divergent tendencies or comes down on one side or the other.

That is why, even for the most skilled craftsman in prose, every

1. "Voluntarism" is the Soviet jargon-word used for derogatory reference to Khrushchev's style of leadership. *Cf.* the expression "cult of personality" as a euphemism for "Stalinism."
2. Another reference to Khrushchev's methods.

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new book means starting all over again from the beginning. All his previous experience loses its significance. He is always in a hopeless dilemma if he tries to put new raw material drawn from life into inappropriate artistic forms; in such a case it is impossible to submit the laws of art to the laws of life, just as the reverse is equally impossible. A certain creative tension is needed between what is conventionally known as art and what can only be the product of the individual artist's sensibility. To resolve the problem by the reimposition of a cultural dictatorship is absolutely impossible without stifling art.

Is everyone in this country aware of this commonplace, not to say banal truism? I'm afraid not. In everyday life we constantly encounter the most crass incomprehension of literature, an incomprehension which is particularly liable to evoke pain and despair when certain impetuous zealots start drawing rash political conclusions from it.

It is amazing that in this day and age, on the forty-ninth anniversary of Soviet power, where art is concerned people are still squeamish about things they should have assimilated while they were still in school. It makes no difference that people's intentions are well-meaning and their ideological views impeccable; all that is irrelevant, because the trouble stems from ignorance, a low standard of aesthetic culture and what one might call licensed obscurantism.

The chief instance of this kind of obscurantism is to be found in the attitude to social criticism in literature. In a famous article, written over a century ago, the great Belinsky writes as follows[3]:

> By its very nature artistic creation demands unconditional freedom in the choice of subject — freedom not only from critics, but from the artist himself. No one has the right to prescribe his subject-matter to him, nor should the artist force himself into a particular approach. Whilst he may adopt a specific viewpoint, it will only ring true if it harmonizes unconstrainedly with his talent, his nature, his instincts and aspirations. If he depicts vice, debauch, and vulgarity, then you must assess whether he has done it truthfully and well, and not try to work out why he did that and not something else [*applause*], or why, having done this, he did not do something else as well. People tend to say: what does this man think he is doing by only describing what is base and vulgar? To which I reply: why shouldn't he? . . .

asks Vissarion Belinsky; and in another passage of the same article he answers:

3. Vissarion Grigorievich Belinsky (1811-1848). Literary critic, nicknamed "furious Vissarion" for the violence of his polemics. A leading "Westernizer," Belinsky was the founder of the sociological school of literary criticism.

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> What is in question is not merely the ability to paint a telling picture of the sordid aspects of life, but something more — the ability to portray the fullness of life in all its reality and truth.[4]

Art is not a caprice of the artist, nor is it the planned product of a society: it is the essence of that society. It is impossible to extract that essence and refashion it in conventional terms without altering the nature of the society itself. Both exist in a form of symbiosis, in a single interdependent whole. Therefore art cannot flourish in a bad society, nor can a highly developed society produce retrograde art.

Aside from theory, literature is also beset with difficulties of a practical nature. We have seen plenty of instances in our time where the excellent theoretical principles of Socialist Realism turn out in practice to resemble something like neoclassicism.[5] It is not thought proper to mention it, but it is no secret that all the symptoms of just such a development in our literature are becoming more and more obvious — when realism loses all substance, truth to life is flouted and reality is abandoned for blatant wishful thinking. I readily agree that defects such as ideological poverty, lack of class sense and abstract humanism are inexcusable in socialist-realist literature. But it is incontestable that their opposites, if raised to the status of a categorical absolute, are also an evil, only in a reverse sense. It is precisely this evil which has done so much harm to socialist realism. And one can see why, if one bears in mind the very apt words which Lenin wrote in " 'Leftism' — an Infantile Disorder of Communism"[6]:

> The surest way of discrediting a new political idea (and not only a political idea) and to damage it while claiming to defend it, is to carry it to the point of absurdity. [*Applause*]

4. Quotation from an article published in the November 1847 issue of the journal *Sovremennik* ("The Contemporary"). Entitled "An Answer to the 'Moskvityanin,' " it is a rejoinder to an attack on Belinsky's views by Yury Samarin, a distinguished Slavophile publicist, that appeared in the Slavophile journal *Moskvityanin* ("The Muscovite"). Belinsky's article is mainly concerned with the "Slavophiles versus Westernizers" argument, but also contains an attack on the criteria and methods of "official" literary criticism and was heavily cut by the czarist censor. It is Belinsky's impeccable antecedents as a precursor of Russian revolutionary political thought that make him such an apt choice for Bykov's text with which to castigate the present regime.
5. The view that Socialist Realism has ossified into a kind of neoclassicism was first put forward by Andrei Sinyavsky in his critical essay entitled "What is Socialist Realism?"
6. Pamphlet published by Lenin in June 1920, condemning extreme, ultra-revolutionary romanticism in the Russian and other Communist parties.

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Surely it must be obvious that undiluted pragmatism, the urge to subordinate literature and art to the needs of today's ephemeral situation and to the requirements of a putative tomorrow, the disregard of the complexities of life and of the dialectics of development, is extremely harmful not only to literature but to society as a whole.

Art acts like a refreshing shower on society, which without its astringent critical effect will inevitably turn moldy and rotten. Those who dispense undiscriminating praise and total affirmation of the status quo are in fact nothing but the gravediggers of society, and it is a great pity that we have so far failed to make clear the full danger of this phenomenon. It is a great pity that to this day many people are still convinced that those who tend to see the negative aspects of our society, and *a fortiori,* those who criticize it, are all infected with the spirit of bourgeois ideology, are denigrators and ideological saboteurs. Surely it cannot be necessary to point out that this attitude is, to say the very least, futile; that the truth, however unpleasant, if put honestly and directly, cannot harm what is good; that our real, as opposed to our imaginary enemies have at all times camouflaged themselves behind sentiments of irreproachable loyalty and have played the false friend to perfection. Do we need to be reminded that all palace revolutions, all stabs in the back, all plots and treasons were carried out by their victims' most trusted associates, by people, in fact, who appeared to be utterly loyal? (*Applause*)

Undoubtedly it requires not only talent but courage to write the truth; but it also needs courage to accept the truth in its fullness and complexity. And here perhaps one should regretfully admit that there are times when certain of our leaders — those, in fact, who should possess this quality in greater measure than others — do not, to put it mildly, show up very well. Whilst paying lip service to the idea that criticism is the driving force of society, they nevertheless do their utmost to ensure that criticism proceeds in one direction only — from the top downward. (*Applause*)

But where literature is concerned there are no such things as the top or the bottom. (*Applause*) Since literature is the science of man, it looks upon the milkmaid and the minister, the rank-and-file Party member and the Secretary of the Central Committee, with equal objectivity.

We all know that like any monopoly, a monopoly of criticism is greatly to the liking of those who wield it. I need not stress its advantages in our political life; but for literature it is fatal. Literature without the critical principle is mere entertainment, philistine trivia.

Surely we learned this lesson well enough from the example of that

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dismal fiasco, the "theory of lack of conflict."[7] To accuse literature of so-called slander or calumny is so clumsy as to be banal; literature has always had to contend with this sort of attack. On this point I would again like to cite the authority of Belinsky. The quotation is a long one, for which I beg your indulgence:

> The most crushing accusation with which writers of the rhetorical school imagine they can finally destroy Gogol consists in saying that the characters he normally portrays in his works are an insult to society. . . . This kind of accusation is more than anything else proof of our social immaturity. In countries which are centuries ahead of us in their development no one would dream of accusing a writer of any such fault. No one can say that the English are not jealous of their national honor; nay, more — no nation has carried national egotism to greater lengths than the English. And yet they love their Hogarth, who depicted nothing but the sins, debauch, abuses and vulgarity of English society of his time. Yet not one Englishman will say that Hogarth slandered England, that he did not also see in her much that was humane, noble, beautiful and sublime. The English realize that talent has the absolute and sacred right to be biased and that it can be great in its very bias. On the other hand they are so profoundly conscious of their national greatness that they have no fear of it being damaged by a public display of the defects and evils of English society. But whilst the immaturity of Russian social consciousness is so lamentable, our society's sensitivity to any slur on its dignity is all too keen. . . . The stronger a man is, the greater his moral stature, the greater his ability to come to terms with his own failures and weaknesses. How much more does this apply to nations, whose age is not three score years and ten but whole centuries. A weak, insignificant or decrepit nation, which is so debilitated that it can progress no further, loves self-praise and above all dare not contemplate its own wounds: it knows that they are mortal, that there is no comfort to be had in facing reality and that self-deception is the only source of that false consolation to which the weak and the decrepit are so susceptible. The Chinese and the Persians are very prone to this; to hear them talk one might imagine that they were the greatest peoples on earth and that compared to them all others are so many scoundrels and buffoons. . . . This is not the behavior of a great nation, of a nation full of strength and vigor; instead

7. Theory developed in the late forties by Stalinist literary ideologues such as the playwright Nikolai Virta. It declared that since virtually all defects had been eliminated from Soviet society, there was no room in literature for conflict between "bad" and "good"; at the most, any conflict should be between "good" and "better." The works based on this theory were so feeble that they were repudiated even by the CPSU.

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> of reducing it to despair and causing it to doubt its powers, an awareness of its own defects should give it new strength and spur it on to new achievements.

Further, Belinsky writes:

> A writer describes a drunkard in a story, and the reader says "How dare he bring shame on Russia by making out that we are nothing but drunkards?" Let us presume that the reader is an intelligent, even a highly intelligent person; even so, to draw this sort of conclusion from the story is ridiculous. Again, we will be told that art should generalize from the particular and that if it depicts nothing but chance phenomena then it is not art at all. True, but the nature of society, and especially of the common people, is so multifarious that it cannot be adequately depicted by a whole literature, much less by a single story.[8]

I apologize for such a long quotation, but I believe that what was said by the "furious Vissarion" is most directly relevant not only to Gogol but to our literature as it is practiced today.

If our publishers and critics were to read Belinsky more often and looked upon him as an authority, they might begin to realize the absurdity of many of the demands they make on literature — demands which were exploded over a century ago by the great liberal critic. Obviously not much has changed since 1847, when those words were written: exactly the same charges are being leveled against literature to this day. A writer only has to depict a slightly unpleasant general for there to be an instant chorus of protest against this undermining of the prestige of the Soviet officer corps; one only needs to create a negative character who happens to be a railwayman, and at once there will be an outcry against this slander on the glorious corps of Soviet railwaymen.

In fact, protests against insulting the Soviet uniform have lately taken on quite a threatening character. I could cite some eloquent examples from my own experience,[9] or from the experience of Alexei Karpyuk,[10] who is known to us all. For his naïve attempt to write a truthful account of his, in my view, blameless and heroic life, he has had to pay a heavy price and will doubtless continue to pay it. I will

8. Further quotation from same article by Belinsky as above.
9. Refers to attacks made on Bykov by Soviet Army leaders, offended by what they regarded as insulting treatment of the army in Bykov's novel *The Dead Feel No Pain,* published in the January 1966 issue of *Novy Mir.*
10. Alexei Karpyuk. Byelorussian writer condemned for an overfrank expôsé of Stalinism.

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not presume on your kind attention by dwelling on this; part of what I might have told you is known to many of you already, and the rest is easily imagined.

In every profession, the skill of the master craftsman in that particular trade is accorded a decisive significance; but not in literature. Where literature is concerned, the rule is that truth flows from the hierarchical principle. Might, as they say, is right; or, the higher you are up the ladder the closer you are to God. At the end of the fifth decade of Soviet power we are still longing for the same thing that concerned Lunacharsky when he said as long ago as 1931:

> It should not be a question of the Central Committee writing the slogans and writers striving to illustrate them, but rather of the Central Committee treating the views of both writers and their readers as just one of many sources of information and drawing from them the impulse to compose their slogans and decrees.[11] [*Applause*]

I fear, alas, that the Central Committee does not read us much nowadays, or if it does then its intentions in doing so are far removed from those envisaged by Lunacharsky.

Writing a good book is a hard job in every way; but getting it published is even harder. The fact is that in this country the only works which are easy to have published are mediocre ones, books which have nothing to say and which are exactly like the hundreds of previous ones already familiar to critics and publishers. Anything which does not exactly conform to official canons is greeted with suspicion and inevitably meets violent resistance from all quarters. In practice the author is faced with the dilemma: either he must accept the publisher's demands or his book will never see the light of day. Often in the published version little remains of the author's original conception. To me, this inbuilt, legitimized mistrust of talent is something amazing and incomprehensible; indeed, I believe it to be an absolute disgrace, and what is more it is fatal to literature. (*Applause*)

And yet — we must keep on and work. We are on the threshold of a great date in our history. We have plenty to write about and talent should never shirk its responsibility. Literature did not start yesterday and will not end tomorrow. There is more to Byelorussian literature than what appears under the imprint of the state publishing house. The

11. Anatoly Vasilievich Lunacharsky (1873-1933). Early Bolshevik, playwright, critic, journalist. First People's Commissar for Education, 1917-1929. Removed from office by Stalin for his liberalizing, heterodox views, of which the remark cited is a typical example.

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diaries and scenarios of Dovzhenko,[12] the works of Nikolaeva,[13] Kuzma Chorny,[14] the long-suffering Goretzky[15] and manuscript works of all ages and in various languages rank no less as literature than all those gorgeous multivolume editions in their leathercloth bindings.

It may be that some people will be displeased by what I have said. Instead, perhaps some people might have liked to hear me repent my sins in the manner of Go Mo-jo,[16] but nowadays this brand of repentance is rather too cheap a commodity, as Makayonok[17] eloquently demonstrated only yesterday. Therefore let us not be hypocritical. We are not enemies of the people, nor are we out to undermine the Soviet government, our loyalty to which has in many cases been proved by shedding our blood. Nor are we even asking for special treatment; all we ask is more patience. Put yourself in our place and you will realize that we do not have much choice. The issue is: either we have a literature or we have none. There is no middle way. (*Applause*)

In conclusion, I should like to say that despite the somewhat gloomy thoughts that I have expressed, I believe in the creative power of our literature, just as I believe in the reasonableness, common sense and goodwill of those responsible for guiding it. I should also like to take this opportunity of thanking the many writers who, before this congress, gave such eloquent proof of their civic courage and professional solidarity in reacting to a certain attack that was directed against me.[18] So long as we writers are united on such vital matters and are prepared to declare ourselves openly, then the Byelorussian people may rest assured about the future destiny of its literature.

Vasil Bykov

(*Translated from the Russian by Michael Glenny*)

12. Alexander Petrovich Dovzhenko (1894-1956). Famous Soviet film director, of Cossack origin. His famous movie *Earth* (1930), about the Russian peasantry on the eve of collectivization, was condemned by official critics as "counter-revolutionary" and "defeatist." He regained favor with *Shchors* (1939), a romanticized picture of a Red Army hero of the civil war. It is known that much of his autobiographical material and unmade screenplays are still banned from publication.
13. Galina Nikolaeva. Distinguished Soviet writer, author of several novels published after being heavily censored.
14. Kuzma Chorny. Byelorussian novelist.
15. Goretzky. Author of several banned works.
16. Go Mo-jo. Leading Chinese writer, former Secretary of the Chinese Writers' Union. Attacked and persecuted during the Cultural Revolution, he made an abject "confession" of his ideological sins.
17. Nikolai Makayonok. Soviet Byelorussian playwright. His comedy entitled *Gallstones* caused severe official displeasure by its biting satire.
18. Refers again to army-inspired attacks on Bykov.

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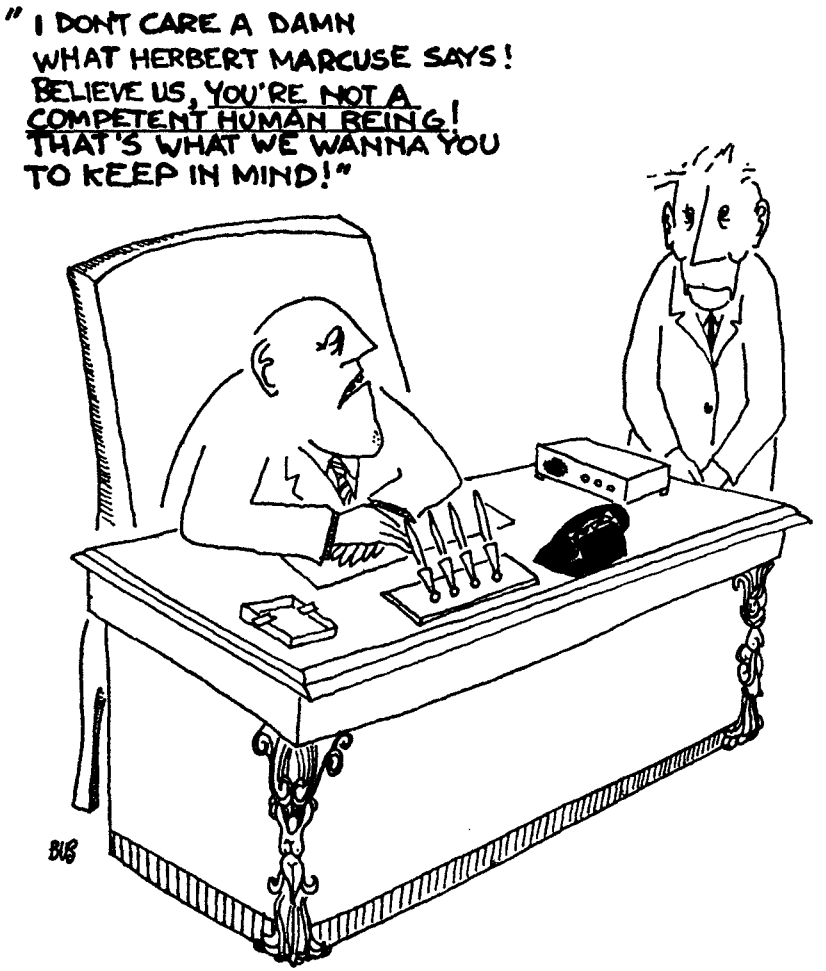
TWO DRAWINGS

by

BUS


" I DONT CARE A DAMN WHAT HERBERT MARCUSE SAYS! BELIEVE US, YOU'RE NOT A COMPETENT HUMAN BEING! THAT'S WHAT WE WANNA YOU TO KEEP IN MIND!"
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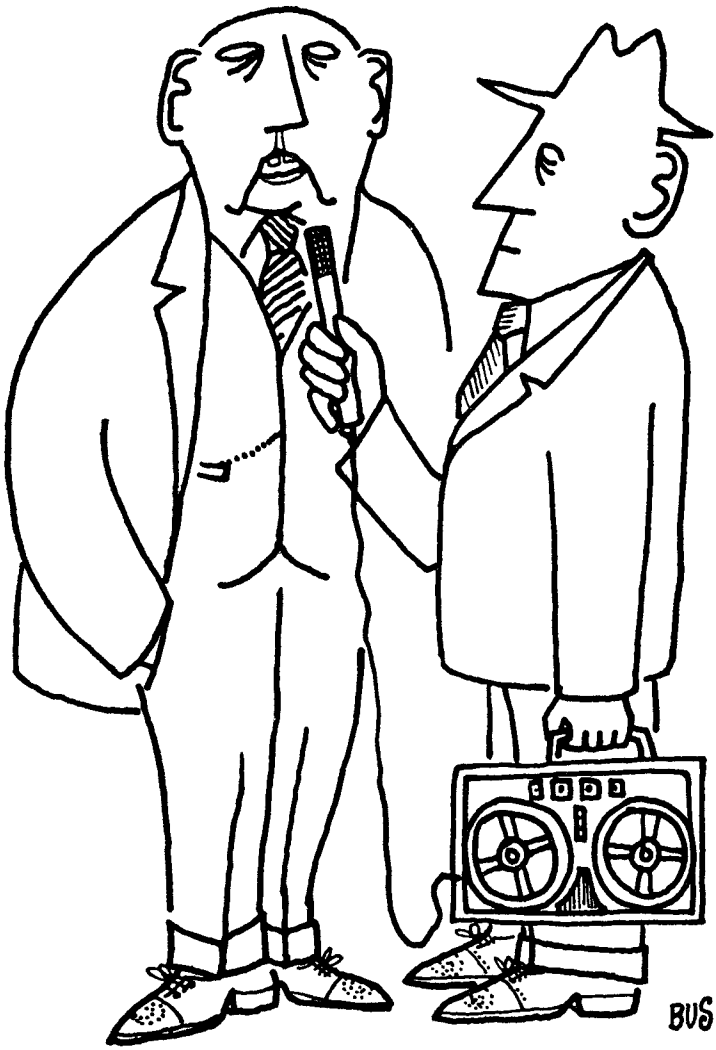
"OUR MAIN TARGET IS NOT TO GET OUR ASS OUT OF VIETNAM. WE JUST DIG THE CEREMONIAL."



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BOOKS

FRANZ K.

CONVERSATIONS WITH KAFKA. By Gustav Janouch. New Directions. $8.50.

This remarkable book, itself the result of a miraculous discovery of material believed lost, is one of the most exciting works — fiction, nonfiction, poetry — I remember having read. To say why it is "exciting" and why I am assured thousands of other readers will find it so, is difficult; one has to think of what Kafka means to us, to all but half a dozen of us, writers and people to whom writing is very important, one has to think and then rethink, to realize just how much Kafka does mean to us . . . because he means more, really, than we can consciously know. (Though our kinship with Kafka is, at last, coming into consciousness: becoming honest. Consider the current issue of *New American Review* [13] which, apart from stories and poetry and things in between that might not have been written, as they are, without Kafka — I'll be generous and mention only Borges, who would freely admit his kinship — there are two stories in which Kafka himself is actually present, one rather uncharacteristically touching story by Leonard Michaels, the other "Seven Sketches" by F. G. Tremallo. A third story, my own "Others' Dreams," is really "The Metamorphosis" redone — but the editors of *NAR* thought it best to change the title, believing that Kafka's story is a tough act to follow. That was in a way part of the point of my story, but I rarely argue with editors. So: in one magazine, in one single issue of that magazine, Kafka all over.) He would have been terrified at his influence, his power. He would have thought it a Kafkaesque horror story; and, before he died, he would have been able to use the adjective "Kafkaesque."

But there is another reason why this book is so important, and that has to do with the repeated assaults on our expectations, the almost predictable revelations of ugly, nasty, roach-sized egos behind the greatest works — and the not so great works, but those we have come to idealize. We cringe to read of the real Dostoevsky, the real Tolstoy,

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even the "real" Roethke; it is all there, but worse than we had imagined.

You will not be embarrassed by anything Kafka says or does; you will not turn away in disgust or bewilderment; you will wonder if perhaps he wasn't a kind of saint, as his friend Janouch suggests: "a prophet of a consistent ethical responsibility for every living thing." If it is possible to fall in love with someone in this way, you will come to love Kafka.

These are all excessive claims, but *Conversations With Kafka* justifies them. Filling in a gap (Kafka's diaries for 1920, when the seventeen-year-old Janouch met him, contain only a page or so of entries; the rest had been torn out and destroyed by Kafka), bringing us into Kafka's physical as well as his intellectual presence, the book is almost like another work of Kafka's, a long lost but now triumphantly published book of meditations, dreams, wisdom. And it is Kafka's most human book. It is a masterpiece of its kind, especially if read together with Kafka's own diaries for the time.

Max Brod seems to have wished that the diaries might have shown Kafka more as he was, in daily life; he comments on the unfortunate "false impression" that every diary makes, since the writer records what is oppressive or irritating. What is there to say about a happy event? So the Kafka of the *Diaries,* like the Kafka of some of his short fiction and *The Trial* and *The Castle,* seems to us maddeningly preoccupied with the Self; it turns out that this is only half of Kafka, the darker half, the half that we have accepted and absorbed into ourselves.

The boy Janouch met Kafka in 1920, when Kafka was thirty-seven years old, in the "cage of his existence" as a lawyer for the Workmen's Accident Insurance Institution in Prague and also as a son, a perpetual doomed son. It is amazing that Janouch should present himself as a person — almost a fictional character — not only intelligent enough to record Kafka's conversation, but one who is spiritually and imaginatively worthy of Kafka's presence. There is no question of Kafka being patronizing to his young, insatiable friend (a would-be poet, himself the son of a good man, but made miserable by his parents' incompatibility); Janouch is exactly the kind of sensitive, precocious boy Kafka could relate to, and to whom he might speak much more freely than he could to anyone else. And if one suspects that Janouch has invented part of this Kafka . . . then he himself is another Kafka, a genius capable of inventing such conversations and such people.

Kafka on friendship: "One huddles into one's so-called private

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life, because one lacks the strength to master the world. One flies from the miraculous into one's own limited self. That is a withdrawal. Being is most of all a being-with-things, a dialogue. One mustn't shrink from that." And so he is never too busy to see the boy, never too unhappy or too ill. One gets the impression that Kafka — quite in contrast to the Kafka of the fiction — is very much involved with other people, sometimes absurdly considerate of them; he is good-humored, witty, paradoxical, an antiegotist ("Suicide . . . is a form of egotism raised to the point of absurdity").

Kafka on expressionist poetry: ". . . a frighteningly authentic proof of disintegration. Each of its authors speaks only for himself. They write as if the language was their own personal property. But language is only lent to the living, for an undefined period. All we have is the use of it. In reality it belongs to the dead and to those who are still unborn. One must be careful in one's possession of it. [The expressionists] are language destroyers. That is a grave offense. An offense against language is always an offense against feeling and against the mind, a darkening of the world, a breath of the ice age." We sense in Kafka's fiction a terrible burden of relatedness: the isolated K. who must relate to the rest of the universe, who has no freedom. In Kafka's conversation we encounter a different person, to whom the relatedness of men is not oppressive, but a good. He identifies with the Zionists, with Walt Whitman ("he combined the contemplation of nature and civilization, which are apparently entirely contradictory, into a single intoxicating vision of life"), with Christianity, with the tradition of art and language. For a while an anarchist (around 1910), he finally rejected radical politics because the reformers "attempted to realize the happiness of mankind without the aid of grace."

Kafka on women? Not so fashionable: "Women are snares, which lie in wait for men on all sides in order to drag them into the merely finite."

But Kafka on love — wise far beyond Schopenhauer: "Love always inflicts wounds which never heal, because love always appears hand in hand with filth. Only the will of the loved one can divide the love from the filth. . . . But [a young, disturbed friend of Janouch's] has no will of his own, and so he is infected by the filth."

Kafka on sin: "Sin is turning away from one's own vocation. . . . The poet has the task of leading the isolated and mortal into eternal life, the accidental into conformity to law. He has a prophetic task."

Of course, the book must be depressing: Kafka will die in 1924. And he is always aware of his impending death, with a "steep declivity" within him. But the dominant impression of Janouch's book is one of

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a really unexpected, somehow miraculous optimism: not only did the quite saintly Kafka exist, but he was a friend of Janouch's, an excellent friend, and *Conversations With Kafka* is the means by which we learn of that friendship and extend our own faith in the possibilities of human contact, the leap of faith between two people, the true communication of souls.

Joyce Carol Oates

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OF BEING NUMEROUS

BLACK FEELING, BLACK TALK, BLACK JUDGMENT. By Nikki Giovanni. Morrow. $6.00; paper $1.75.

LIVINGDYING. By Cid Corman. New Directions. $5.00.

EARTHWORKS. By Sandra Hochman. Viking. $10.00.

COLLECTED POEMS. By Alan Dugan. Yale. $6.50.

PLACES TO GO. By Joanna Kyger. Black Sparrow. Limited edition $15.00; paper $4.00.

In a poem springing from Buchenwald called "La Preface," Charles Olsen says:

It is the radical, the root, he and I, two bodies
We put our hands to these dead.

"Radical" is "root," a term in algebra, biology and linguistics. In Olsen's opinion, poets were more radical than other people (including so-called radical political types) because they were more rooted: in forms of things, in their own living bodies and in the language.

Nikki Giovanni, the young woman who has written *Black Feeling, Black Talk, Black Judgment,* a collection of poems written between 1964 and 1969, seems to be a radical in most of Olsen's senses. This feels good. It also hurts. The early poems, written mostly to friends and lovers, reveal an attractive, lively personality, full of youthful exuberance, youthful pride, youthful sexiness and frankness:

Those were barefoot boy with cheek of tan days
And I was John Henry hammering to get in

I was the camel with the cold nose

Now, having the tent, I have no use for it
I have pushed you out

Go 'way
Can't you see I'm lonely

Blackness here is a gift and a pleasure, with "Black leaders / And / Black Love," and comic political comment. But a change takes place, apparently based on the discovery that one's own politics of joy do not so rapidly alter the universe. In mid-book, Giovanni declares, ". . . it's wrong that we hate but it's even more wrong to love when neither love nor hate have anything to do with what must be done."

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Now the language moves into "Bitter Black Bitterness" and "Nigger / can you kill / can you kill." Humanity is transformed to "Niggers," "Blacks," "Honkies," etc. There are instructions on making Molotov cocktails, and the insistence that "All honkies and some negroes will have to die / This is unfortunate but necessary." What *Black Feeling, Black Thought, Black Judgment* records, in fact, is a classical struggle between Love and Duty. Here, as of old, Duty means "to kill."

One thinks of LeRoi Jones, of course, but a better comparison is a poet neither black nor American. In a time as ill as our own, Bertolt Brecht wrote a poem to posterity, apologizing for having been brutalized in the struggle against brutality. Giovanni declares of her work, "Some folk will say that the poems are anti-white but that's not where I'm coming from. You can be pro without being anti," and "I do not want you to call me a militant under any circumstances." Some of the poems would belie this. But "I try to write about black love." That she does so, successfully and joyously, throughout this book and sometimes in despite of ideology, means radical progress.

Cid Corman has long been a poet's poet: a writer neither very profuse — all his books are "slender" ones — nor very aggressive, but central. To read Corman is to become conscious of one's breathing, how slightly it separates us from things like stones. The pure language, in minimal lines like those of Williams or Creeley, makes one think of other arts in their purity: a clean tone of harpsichord music, or flute, or lute, or Matisse colors, or *sumi* painting or the Zen archer, shooting well. In miles per minute, the two-line inscription which closes *Living-dying* moves astonishingly far: *"Where I kneel / a rock stands."* In "The World at Santo Spirito," Corman writes:

see
nothing is

but trembles
divine, more
more sea
down there

where the
garden halts
and the sands
smooth out.

Like Creeley's "The Rhythm," this poem first opens, then closes — begins in sunshine, ends in dark and seems to see all the world we will ever know.

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The half-hundred brief lyrics on the unpaginated pages of *Livingdying* are meditative, ruminative, formal. Some are nature poems inhabited by trees, wind, time. Some explore the poignance of mortal self. Some touch slightly on personal relationships. The emotional tone is mostly one of controlled, classical mild melancholy:

leaf by leaf
returns to earth—
no one counts—
the number is
too well known

As in Frost's "Nothing Gold Can Stay," the strength is in the understatement.

In contradistinction to the modesty of *Livingdying,* Sandra Hochman's *Earthworks* is a big book which comes recommended by Norman Mailer and James Dickey. Amazing, one thinks. Can these prisoners of masculinity be recognizing a woman as their literary equal? Alas, no. Hochman is a kind of rich, Jewish, updated Edna St. Vincent Millay, with Millay's propensity to sway between self-adoration ("Here are the Degas nudes — you say they look like me") and self-pity ("I am lost / Like some rare bird / That could never be caged"), and with Millay's girlish love of happiness, romance, liberty and bright sensual things — though without her equally girlish political-social idealism or her admiration for discipline and form. Hence everything in *Earthworks* seems to occur in a mirror, at levels of emotion and intellect which sum themselves in "my unwillingness to grow up." What of wit? What of anger or lust? What of grapplings between the self and the outer world? From a Mailer-Dickey point of view, Hochman is the ideal woman writer: no threat.

Within these limitations, the recollections of childhood may ring long-forgotten bells, and we may all sympathize with the evocations of the woe that is in marriage. The empathy with seascapes, exotic lands, feathers and shells, flowers and vegetables, will be appreciated by those who appreciate such things. In brief, people who don't read much poetry, or whose own emotional lives are not very well developed, or who have pretty fixed ideas about what women poets should do, will find *Earthworks* hot stuff.

Days like these, to take Alan Dugan from the shelf is like finding another grownup at a birthday party for kiddies. An intelligent being! You want to fall to your knees in gratitude. Warfare versus Peace, for example, is a major theme in *Collected Poems*; unlike other writers

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who have been to the wars, Dugan neither boasts nor sobs, but like a man suckled on Virgil, Horace and Tacitus, he is businesslike and undeluded: war is interesting, but it is still hell, and an officer is still a "Pig / in a uniform," while peace is not great but it is good — the ex-soldier can wake "from honey-hearted sleep . . . in his own bed for a change" and the hard-headed can grin at a hero who has become a statue, "to you the glory, brother, / and to us the girls." There are no hawklike or dovelike answers in Dugan. He merely pays grim and merry attention to basics, whether he sings of childhood, lust, liquor, the dusty life of offices, city streets, domestic tranquility, birth, as in "Coat of Arms":

What a joker, like me:
he came into the womb
where I was, poked around
and spat and left and I
was forced out wet
into the cold air. Someone
slapped me and I wept
to have become a travelling man,

or the cycle of mortality, as in "Winter's Onset," where, like another Irishman committed to writing poems as cold and passionate as the dawn, he moves fast from a brilliant simile down to first principles without a trace of neon:

The first cold front came in
whining like a carpenter's plane
and curled the warm air
up the sky: winter is
for busy work, summer
for construction. As for
spring and fall, ah you
know what we do then:
sow and reap.

As a craftsman, Dugan is extraordinary. He loads every rift with concrete; he makes a hard, crunching music; and his control of momentum, is peerless: the poems, one after another, come barreling down the alley like big black bowling balls and down you go.

Finally, as Jean Shepherd used to remark after doing a turn on the kazoo, nothing beats genius. Risking folly, let us propose that Joanna Kyger is a genius, though a weird one.

The places to go in *Places to Go* are various head trips. In the

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opening poem, "The Pigs for Circe in May," hunger pangs while camping in Yosemite lead to a vision which includes

> *Can you imagine*
> *those lovely beasts all tame prancing around him?*
> *She made a lot of pigs too.*
> *I like pigs. Cute feet, cute nose, and I think*
> *some spiritual value investing them. A man and his pig together,*
> *rebalancing the pure in them, under each other's arms, bathing,*
> *eating it.*

The penultimate poem is a long pastiche-parody of the *Discourse on Method,* called "DESCARTES AND THE SPLENDOR OF," done in a dead-earnest hilarity which resembles nothing in the world but *Tristam Shandy,* and contains cute moments like:

I realize that to doubt is a drag, and a perFECT BEING would accept everything. But from WHENCE DID I GET MY IDEA OF PERFECTION!!!!! PLACED IN ME BY A NATURE, BY A NATURE IN REALITY MORE PERFECT THAN MINE and WHICH EVEN POSSESSES WITHIN ITSELF ALL THE PERFECTION OF WHICH I COULD FORM ANY IDEA, that is to say, IN A SINGLE WORD, MOTHER GOD.

All the work in *Places to Go* is experimental. Handling it is like handling a porcupine traveling at the speed of light, because in addition to her technical leaping about from one kind of form to another (and favoring forms with long lines distinguishable from prose only by sheer condensation and subtlety of rhythmic play), Kyger typically writes in 3-D stream of consciousness, letting myths, memories, wild imagined scenarios and shrewd observations all surface together. One poem is an experience of flight, surging above encouraging friends. Another is a vision of a dying old man. There is a possible version of the creation, there is a hallucinatory nightmare of the rising moon, there is "A NOVEL" in eight chapters, eight pages, there is a fine and funny poem of reminiscence called "Here," with one passage simultaneously recalling *Alice in Wonderland, Portrait of the Artist,* Groucho Marx and a phrase perhaps stolen from Sir Thomas Wyatt:

> *A red setter came into the kitchen and ate half*
> *the turkey in the oven. Before I got locked up. I shit in*
> *a pail. Take out the clothespins first. The cat did similarly*
> *just like it was born to, on newspapers in the garage. After*
> *that I went into training, developing artistic talents*

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Can you act my mother said, and she whapped me on the knuckles with the dinner knife Out there again

doing the same thing with newspaper and it flees from me. I tried, I tried, I am *good, anything, as quick as a wink.*

Kyger is not "disciplined," but she is a radically original combination of symbolist and comedienne. *Places to Go* has been published by Black Sparrow in an extremely limited edition, so buy now; it looks promising; it may become a Rare Book.

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STAGE LEFT

THE REVOLUTION SCRIPT. By Brian Moore. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. $6.95.

The blurb insensitively places *The Revolution Script* "in the tradition of" *In Cold Blood,* giving the impression that Brian Moore's book cashes in on a fashion ("tradition" is surely flagrant) created by Capote's success. If there is any literary opportunism, however, it is irrelevant to the book's importance and success: except for the conflation of fiction and journalism, the two works couldn't be more different. In the first place, the factual basis of Moore's book is of a totally different order from that of Capote's. The kidnapping of the British Trade Commissioner and the murder of the Labor Minister of Quebec by cells of the Front de Libération du Québec in 1970 were globally interesting events: the protagonists of the whole drama included the Canadian Premier; the last act was televised live. Its political implications were immediately visible — behind the crime, everybody at once recognized "the Quebec question." The Clutter murders were, in comparison, local news: the victims were ordinary, the killers pathological, the crime "a psychological accident." Whatever political significance that tragedy had lay deep below the surface, made evident perhaps only by the ironic undertow of inevitability that the creation of a fiction out of it generates. By contrast, Moore has it made — there is no unknown to question, only a determining social situation to exhibit. At the same time, the FLQ action has its drawbacks as fictional material. The private tragedy of the Clutters has no problems of duration: six years elapse between the crime and the publication of Capote's book without loss of impact, for it is *a* story of "modern" America. Brian Moore's subject is *the* Canadian event of 1970: its immediate importance means that it has duration only in history books, which abstractly assess its cause and effects in a complex process. The book has appeared soon after the event, as though sensing its fragile topicality.

A straight comparison is unfair, however, precisely because *The Revolution Script* is alert to all these factors, and creatively responsive to them. It is about what it says it is about — "revolution" acknowledges the ready-made historicity of the events; "script" suggests both that it is a project for a revolution, rather than the event itself, and that it is a

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theatrical performance. This is a fiction about a fiction, specifically a novel about a television drama. "We had our manifesto read on television after all," says Jacques Lanctôt at the end: "It was a revolutionary act, wasn't it?" The underlying question is not the Quebec problem, but the role of television and the media in a divided urban society. The struggle is between the "children of Canada's first TV generation," who try to use the media as an instrument of war against their oppressive world, and the "master of television," Trudeau, who uses it as an instrument of control. It is this that gives the events in Quebec their repeatable significance: the effects of the media on the nature of communication (mainly making "act" a precondition of "talk") and their role in the distribution of power. *The Revolution Script* is tenaciously about this, and about the private lives of those who enter this "theater of fright." In this too it is very different from *In Cold Blood:* the Kansas murders are the product of remoteness; Moore presents us with an intensified proximity.

On the face of it, Moore's attitude to his theme seems to be clear: his position is that of the liberal committed to the values of a printed culture who recognizes the terrible gulfs in the society he portrays and is at the same time appalled by the way in which the media enable those gulfs to be traversed not by communication but by communiqué, ultimata, "statement" — all the paraphernalia of confrontation. Trudeau can never know the way Marc Carbonneau, the traditional working-class Marxist, feels, because he has never lived his life, and because he is concerned primarily with his television impact ("Just watch me" is his final comment at the end of the chapter which has narrated his whole point of view). Equally, the FLQ are prevented by their Marxist language from understanding the complexities of the pressures on Trudeau and the Canadian government. Their manifesto is composed of a "sour Mao dough" beneath which there is a "leaven" of truth (which it takes, probably, a book to be able to identify). The "reasonable men" of the book are, characteristically, the lawyers, Demers and Mergler, who *negotiate* in order to minimize bloodshed. The story ends with a much heavier sense of the price paid than of anything gained, with Carbonneau phoning his abandoned family before leaving Canada for good, with Suzanne Lanctôt seven months pregnant silently brooding on her Cuban future, with James Cross faltering as he recalls the death of Pierre Laporte. Nevertheless there were major gains — Trudeau exposed, Levesque acknowledging that the program of the Parti Québeçois would have to be radicalized, the world aware as never before of the plight and feeling of the French

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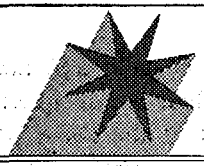

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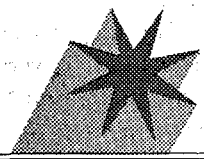

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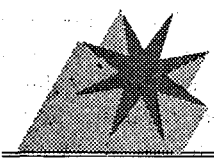

RITES OF PASSAGE

by Joanne Greenberg

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Canadians and, perhaps above all, the sour dough of the FLQ manifesto not merely read on television, but permanently printed between hard covers and given a context of empathic fictions which humanize the abstractions. Maybe the price paid is grotesquely high, but that might be the way it is for some people and some communities: the coming of television might mean that the only effective way to express our interests is to act out our drama in the light of high publicity. But before television maybe there was no way. The world the FLQ rejects is a shabby forgotten world their forebears accepted. Moore makes this clear for us, but he is able to do so because their violence has insured that it may not be forgotten.

I've recently heard another Irish writer make the same point about Ulster — that the media precipitate the dramatization of roles. Belfast and Montreal have much in common, not least that Brian Moore is the poet of both their repressed respectabilities: it is his Belfast Catholic background that gives him his sensitivity to the French Canadian, and it is a sensitivity which seems to me to work against the overt polemic which I've just discussed. His whole *prédilection d'artiste* joins imaginatively in the violent assertion against the oppressive world: when he writes of downtown Montreal that "this mean little life down here in the shadow of the mountain, below the big English mansions accepted this white-nigger slum, this *nous autres* existence," we see more than the liberal's concessive sympathy. It is the novelist Brian Moore writing with all the felt frustration of his lonely, excluded heroes and heroines whose only release is in the destruction of their routine worlds and their habits of mind. History confers drama on the dull dead town of Gavin Burke in *The Emperor of Ice Cream* when the air raids come to Belfast, shattering his home and his indoctrinated moral conscience. Significantly, in *The Revolution Script,* the only real empathy with the other side is when Pierre Laporte, himself imprisoned, hurls himself against the window in a violent bid to escape — at that moment, his psychology is at one with the psychology of the FLQ. The media offer them their one chance to violate their oppressive world, and the book turns toward their defeat once Trudeau moves to take control of the media. This may be the theater of fright, but the creator of Judith Hearne, of Diarmuid Devine, of Gavin Burke knows that liberation is a nightmare from which we all too often try to escape: pre-electronic heroes, these are doomed by their isolation and their ideological incompetence. History, we are bound to feel, was kinder to the FLQ. I don't want to seem patronizing and suggest that the book has an unconscious meaning which runs counter to the overt attitude;

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I'm saying no more than that the liberal outlook and the imaginative sympathy wrestle with one another, or, in other words, that it is a novelist's book.

So far, then, from it being a merely occasional work, *The Revolution Script* seems to me to be the product of a continuous concern in Moore's work with *nous autres* and the potentialities of liberation within an urban and highly controlled world. Beyond that, it seems to me to be an important development. Moore tends to be described as an efficient but unadventurous realist, but his novels portray a much more problematic relationship between subject and object than this suggests. The sharply observed facts of contiguous existence are normally highly orchestrated in his world, so that a relatively small number of objects and people accrue significance as obstacles in the mind of the protagonist in his usually thwarted, often unwilling journey toward self-assertion: a precarious identity is maintained by contractual clichés as much as by an environment or a social group and at the same time incarcerated by them. The novels of the fifties tended to portray a flickering outburst of self-begotten vitality followed by a devastated accommodation. *The Emperor of Ice Cream,* however, charted an escape, and the novels which followed it, *I Am Mary Dunne* and *Fergus,* both have escaped protagonists. Curiously, they do little but confront their past, which keeps asserting itself as a reality in the fairy-tale world of their new life (rich New York, paradisal California). In *Fergus,* even the chairs hang in the air; other characters talk to a deaf hero, himself carrying on internal battles with the past from which he has broken. *I Am Mary Dunne* is a very fine novel, but perhaps because the heroine is as oppressed in her new social world as in that she escapes: Mary is no longer Dunne, she is a much named object of male sexual curiosity. But in *Fergus,* the real has become entirely internal, subject only to the vagaries of memory: its hero has no present, and the inexplicable affirmation at the end seems pointless. Clearly the inadequate victim, Judith or Devine or Ginger, is an expendable vessel for the reality of Montreal or Belfast. But Mary and Fergus seem to have no radically different relationship with it: they have been released, not liberated. Emigration does not change it, but merely tries to shut it out. *The Revolution Script* not merely breaks away from that rather unbalanced introspective mode by celebrating the interconnections between separate consciousnesses, but succeeds in dramatizing the interaction of those minds with the theater they choose to seek their liberation in. We watch the FLQ making an assault on their lives made

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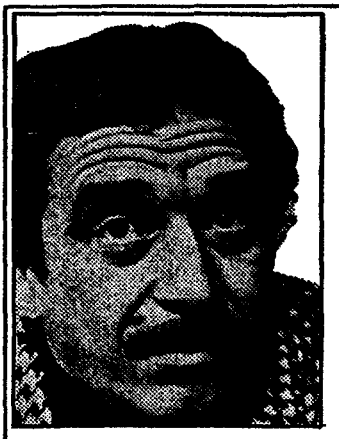
possible only by the selective mirror of the media. It is significant and heartening that the narrator of the urban limbo should in turn make himself the mirror of that liberation's probable fiction. *Fergus* and *The Revolution Script,* both concerned with the price of freedom, seem to point in opposite directions; I hope it is the latter that indicates the road Brian Moore's work will take.

John Goode



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OF MICE AND MEN

BEYOND FREEDOM AND DIGNITY. By B. F. Skinner. Knopf. $6.95.

It isn't remarkable to finish a book and regret having spent the time reading it, so Skinner's book can't be distinguished from many others that way. But what is really distressing is that the book deals badly with a very important set of questions. I approached it with some optimism because *Walden Two* is an important statement on utopias and Skinner's work in experimental psychology is of considerable competence and interest. But *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* is a poor treatment of the problems of a comprehensive science of man. It is dogmatic, shallow in its discussion of issues and vague where clarity is needed. Skinner had the opportunity to confront the profound questions raised by the possibilities of controlling human behavior; instead he has written a cranky work which he uses to peddle covertly his own values under the aegis of science.

There isn't space here to discuss all the issues which Skinner raises but fails to deal with seriously, so let me illustrate my charges with Skinner's treatment of the role of ideas and rational argument in his behaviorist framework. Skinner thinks that the "literature of freedom and dignity" is a positive evil since it stands in the way of the effective utilization of methods of behavior control. It prolongs the use of ineffective and objectionable modes of punishment, "stands in the way of further human achievements," fosters, for example, the use of resources in the design of automobiles at the expense of life in city ghettos and, in sum, is tied to the problems of population and ecology and enhances the prospects of nuclear war. What might be pointed out here is not the falsity of these ideas, although I think them almost certainly false; but rather that Skinner attributes enormous power to this "literature" and yet such power of ideas seems for a Skinnerian behaviorist impossible in theory.

In fact, Skinner spends only ten pages on the influence of ideas on behavior, and all he really says is that the processes of rational thought can be understood by relating them to "contingencies of reinforcement." What this means is that all man's cognitive activity can be explained by reference to previous rewards and punishments. Perhaps, but Skinner gives neither evidence nor sustained argument to support his claim. Indeed, it is difficult to understand the process of rational argument — as opposed to coercion and psychological persuasion — as a function of

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reward and punishment. When someone is convinced of the truth of some proposition it is not the same as when a person is forced to behave a certain way. Yet Skinner simply *asserts* that the process of rational thought can be understood in the same way that a rat can learn to run a maze. And to make matters worse, instead of probing the issues, he accuses his opponents of being sick. According to Skinner, "there are signs of emotional instability in those deeply affected" by the literature of freedom and dignity.

Thus Skinner fails to deal properly with the place of concepts like freedom and dignity in the science of human behavior and the function of such a science. He is unrelentingly dogmatic and shallow on both these questions. For Skinner, ideas like human freedom are obsolete or false (he isn't clear which); and, he thinks, if only people would stop talking about human freedom, our problems could be solved by methods of behavioral control.

Yet one searches in vain for any concrete definition of concepts like human freedom. I gather that a free act for Skinner would be one which was not explainable by genetic or environmental factors. If so, it is an open question whether or not a science of behavior will show that there are no free acts in this sense. But even if not, there still would be other senses in which "human freedom" can be understood. There would still be a difference between free and coerced action, as there would be the sense of freedom arising from knowing the casual influences operative on one's self (this is a common experience in analysis). In this respect, Skinner's assumption that a science of human behavior entails the uselessness of the concepts of freedom and dignity is simply false.

But supposing that all human behavior is traceable to genetic and environmental factors, then a second question arises on which Skinner is of little use. Given such a science, we would have to face the problem of what to do with it. Skinner correctly points out that a weakness of much social commentary is that it takes people's desires, wants, preferences and so on, as a given. It is not asked *why* one has the wants he happens to have. And it is true that sometimes they can be traced back to environmental influences, e.g. advertising. But even if we recognize that our desires may be products of our environment, the question of what we should do with this knowledge has not been answered by Skinner. We still must ask: *what future shall we choose?*

One thing to note in discussing this question is that a science of behavior does not remove the necessity of choice. A science of behavior would reveal the effects of existing environments and the consequences

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of creating new ones. But we still would have to decide what kind of environments we want. For although we may be products of our environment, the fact is that some experiences stimulate the ability to choose while others deaden it. Knowledge of the role of environment makes it possible for us to create environments which foster independence, spontaneity and unpredictability — as well as environments which make people more dependent and predictable. Therefore, a science of human behavior does not preclude human freedom and may, in fact, be used to foster it.

Intelligent choice also involves making one's values clear. Skinner seems to have values about the future but he hides them under a cloak of "science" and neutrality. He distiguishes three levels of values: the personal, the social and the cultural. The most fundamental value is that of cultural survival, which is the only value "according to which a culture is eventually to be judged." But who is going to make the eventual judgment, and are other values also involved? All he says is that if the culture does not engender a concern for its survival, then it is less likely to survive. He cites no evidence that concern for cultural survival increases the probability of survival. And, in the end, Skinner admits that he has not given a "good reason" for caring about the survival of culture since there is none. In fact, given Skinner's view of reasoned argument, it is a mystery how he can distinguish between "good" and "bad" reasons.

Perhaps on the level of platitude one can accept cultural survival as a basic value. But the pressing question is what *sort* of culture we should try to preserve or create. What kind does Skinner want? Since his values are hidden under a facade of scientism, one has to look carefully. In a discussion of utopias, he says that the fundamental question for any utopia is whether it would really work — apparently the desirability of the utopia is irrelevant. The occasion for utopian thought is that a "traditional culture has been examined and found wanting," which would suggest a set of values beneath Skinner's "hard" science. They surface when he identifies the problems of our culture: "students no longer respond in traditional ways to educational environments; they drop out of school . . . they take only courses which they enjoy . . . they destroy school property and attack teachers and officials." Young people "refuse to serve in the armed forces and desert or defect to other countries" and "work as little as possible," and "workers are not very productive and often absent." Some of his other "problems" are less problematic, such as the almost continuous warfare between nations. But, obviously, different values lead to a different formulation: we

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might, for example, want better schools, or a nation with no Vietnams or an economy without alienated workers. And far from making questions of value irrelevant, a study of behavior would make them more urgent as man must increasingly face the question of his future. It is useless to play with abstract notions of "culture" when the issue is to determine the concrete culture we find most humane.

Andrew McLaughlin

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COMMUNICATIONS

A POLITICS OF AUTHENTICITY

We oppose the opinions expressed by Sartre in the interview with Frank Gerassi, published in *The Manchester Guardian* and reprinted in *The New York Times Magazine*, for the very reason that Sartre proposes them, that is, in order to help create a responsible and imaginative Left opposition in the United States.

Although Sartre draws upon his French experience, he is basically addressing himself to American radical intellectuals, most of whom are connected with the academe.

The argument runs as follows. The accelerating crisis in Western civilization notwithstanding, intellectuals have, on the whole, profited from their status — they have made money and been granted prestige. Even Left intellectuals have come to constitute a kind of priesthood, relatively immune, yet free to criticize the society which supports them. It is intolerable and corrupting for Left intellectuals to profit from this crisis. They can only authenticate themselves by taking an active part in the struggle against the establishment. Signing one's name to unpopular petitions, or merely writing, merely thinking, no matter how radical, are, in the absence of action, counterrevolutionary.

It follows, the argument runs, and here is where our disagreement begins, that intellectuals must come out of their offices or studies into the streets, playing whatever role is necessary — demonstrating (in lonely bands, not insulated by thousands of liberals), distributing pamphlets and running the risk of being beaten up. (Sartre makes the latter point very strongly.) Above all, they must forge a new language in order to get in touch with, while being mentors to, the workers and, presumably, the *lumpenproletariat*. They should set up a sort of workers' press. Sectarian or academic jargon only impedes communication, and must be aban-

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doned. Should intellectuals fail in their ultimate responsibility, or have recourse to petty bourgeois escape mechanisms (Sartre gives his own work on Flaubert as a likely example), their bad faith will have been established once and for all. And they will become, as he puts it, borrowing the idiom, part of the problem, since they have chosen not to be part of the solution. (Sartre alludes also to his own record. He has, it seems, done some of the things he calls for.)

What are we to make of this, remembering that Sartre's credentials as a Marxist and an existentialist are impressive and, perhaps, unique?

It can be said at once that he seems innocent, and, at the same time, self-derogating to an unusual degree. He is innocent when he assumes that physical risk is, if not quite a value in itself, the test of the authenticity of one's position. Unfortunately, it is not. Some fascists have been willing to die for (or in spite of) their views and some Marxists have been cowards. Of the leading German existentialists, we need not speak. Sartre not only overrates a certain kind of courage, he seems to be confusing courage with truth. Going into the streets may be for

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him a kind of atonement; as he has told us over and over again, he despises his own intellectuality. But going into the streets in no way validates his views. Still, it would be wrong to evade Sartre's point. For his intellectual side has, after all, imperialized the whole of his being. But this does not set him apart. In that sense, most of us are deformed — intellectuals, workers, poets, athletes, scientists, etc. We are incomplete; we share a deadening specialization. Marx, of course, found the extreme division of labor and the consequent deformation of personality essential to the class systems of the advanced industrial states. These conditions can only be transcended through socialism and the human use of technology. And the struggle for socialism can only be undertaken by deformed men who recognize their deformations, track them to the source and learn to put them to good use. Rebels fight to assuage their personal wounds. Revolutionaries sublimate them to the imperatives of social struggle.

Moreover, intellectuals in the United States are no less but no more incomplete or inauthentic than workers. They will not become authentic by going into the steets. All that requires is passion or resentment — along with the kind of courage that most men are capable of when deeply moved or desperate. But the primary struggle is not in the streets — it is in the bureaucracies that define our society. Men of the Left who are intellectuals have no right to abandon the effort to understand and analyze the absurdly complicated conditions under which we are compelled to live. Nor do we have the right to simplify, either for the sake of popularity or public support. Simplification is a terrible lure, as the Left in particular has had occasion to learn. Those who woo the "masses" in reductive language imperil themselves, and the cause to which they dedicate themselves; they become vulnerable to countersimplification. This is not to say that language cannot be improved — the purer the better, but only to serve, while creating the complexities of social reality. Does anyone understand this better than Sartre?

It is as quixotic for the American intellectual to try to become a worker as it is for the worker to try to become an intellectual. In such an effort, each would cease to be either. Workers and intellectuals must *learn from each other*. But each must stick to his last. We have no choice. We do not live in a peasant country and we are not in a Chinese situation historically, structurally or culturally. A few figures will help delineate this obvious truth.

Of the eighty million Americans now employed, just about 4 percent are in agriculture (roughly equivalent to the number in the Army, less than half the number of college and university students). About

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35 percent are blue-collar workers, a little more than half of these are unionized, a little less than half are engaged in direct production. The latter group is shrinking as a result of automation and related processes and is, at the same time, being cemented into the foundations of business unionism. Almost half of all Americans employed are white-collar workers, perhaps 15 percent of these are unionized. And at least 68 percent of the working population exclusive of those in agriculture is employed in service producing industries, as distinguished from goods producing industries, *e.g.*, mining, construction and manufacturing. Such statistics can be compounded in a variety of perspectives — but they all point to the same conclusion, namely, that the particular class alignments and occupational distribution which once served as the empirical basis for a traditional socialist, particularly a Marxist, analysis of American society no longer hold. This does not lead one to abandon either socialism or Marxism, but rather to refocus insights, tactics and goals in accordance with American reality.

The question is, then, how does one *transform* an hierarchical, industrial, bureaucratic-capitalist state, not merely exchange it for an hierarchical, industrial, bureaucratic state under some other name? Moreover, we cannot heal the breach between mental and manual labor by manifestos. That is a consummation to be worked for, as the configurations of a new society become clearer, not a condition to be achieved immediately. Indeed the effort to achieve it now can short-circuit, not enhance, the Left.

What then, can Leftist intellectuals do? What immediate responsibilities do they have? No more and no less than other specialized workers. Intellectuals must redouble their efforts to radicalize their own sphere of operations. They must take responsibility for transforming the bureaucratic hierarchies in which they work into human habitations. And that means, of course, assuming power — and implies a struggle on the highest symbolic levels — a struggle of words and ideas, and when and if it comes to it, a struggle of bodies. Indeed the more effective the intellectual ultimately is in this struggle, the more eager the police will be to arrest him. He should not permit himself to be arrested easily, or, the times justifying it, he should not permit himself to be arrested at all.

Universities, factories, government agencies, the Army, are all arenas for this kind of action on the part of those in each structure who can be objectively defined as creating the essential goods and services by their direct labor. It is the job of the Left to continue to analyze the society at large and devise appropriate tactics. The professional in-

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tellectuals must first set about liberating themselves by changing the character of their immediate environments and therefore getting in touch with the vanguard of blue- and white-collar workers similarly engaged in the factories and unions, and also with the self-emancipating elements among the small bourgeoisie, and with that new growing *lumpenproletariat*, the drop-outs and the excluded. So far as the industrial workers are concerned, they will transform the factories or the factories will not be transformed at all. Intellectuals who leave their own places of work in order to instruct others may be evading, rather than assuming, their true responsibilities.

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CONTEMPORARY NONSENSE

Worcester City Hospital, a municipally-supported institution, cannot be compelled to perform a sterilization operation requested by a welfare mother of eight, US Senior Judge Charles E. Wyzanski Jr. ruled.

In dismissing the . . . complaint, Wyzanski wrote, in part: "What the plantiff seems to regard as significant is that her appetite for sexual intercourse is so fundamental and so like an appetite for food that she is being denied equal protection if she is not permitted freely, and without risk, to enjoy such intercourse with her husband, he not wearing the inconvenient condom . . . It does not seem to her a sufficient constitutional right . . . for her to be remitted to the alternative of chastity or sexual embraces short of intercourse."
(*The Boston Globe,* March 22, 1972.) Contributed by Mrs. Davis Herron, Milton, Massachusetts.

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA (AP) — A 59-year-old housewife died of a heart attack in front of the television cameras after being told she had won her round in a quiz show.

Maud Walker was a contestant in the quiz program "Temptation," being filmed yesterday at a local studio before an audience. An executive of the station said the program would not be shown, but "when the relatives recover from shock, we may offer them the film of the program. I'm sure they would like to see how happy she was."
(Plainfield, New Jersey *Courier-News,* March 8, 1972.) Contributed by Thomas Edwards, Plainfield, New Jersey.

PARIS — Starting April 29 the 350,000 couples who are expected to marry in France from then to the end of the year will receive the beginnings of a home library, courtesy of the Ministry of Education.

The gifts are the ministry's way of observing "the year of the book," sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, as well as of encouraging a taste for reading in a population not noted for it.

An aide to Oliver Guichard, the Education Minister, said: "You will note that each list contains some good stories that people will want to read. We want to create a psychological shock in France." Poetry has been omitted because of its discouraging effect.
(*The New York Times,* February 27, 1972.)

EDITORS' NOTE: We'd like to remind our readers that they are invited to send in examples of nonsense. A free subscription to PR will be awarded for each contribution used. In case of a tie, single copies will be sent to the latecomers.

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